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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**VIOLENCE IN HONDURAS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
FAILURE IN PUBLIC SECURITY AND THE STATE'S
RESPONSE TO CRIMINALITY**

by

Roger A. Carvajal

June 2014

Thesis Advisor
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**VIOLENCE IN HONDURAS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FAILURE IN PUBLIC
SECURITY AND THE STATE'S RESPONSE TO CRIMINALITY**

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Major, United States Army
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(WESTERN HEMISPHERE)**

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ABSTRACT

The incidence of violence in Honduras currently is the highest in Honduran history. In 2014, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported the Honduras homicide rate, at 90.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, as the highest in the world for nations outside of war. It is the foundation of this thesis that the Honduran security collapse is due to unresolved internal factors—political, economic, and societal—as well as the influence of foreign factors and actors—the evolution of the global illicit trade. Two of the most important areas affecting public security in Honduras are the challenges posed by transnational organized crime and the relative weakness and fragility of the Honduran state to provide basic needs and security to the population. The emergence of criminal gangs and drug traffickers, and the government's security policies, are all factors that have worsened public security. The crime environment has overwhelmed the police, military, judicial system and overcrowded the prison system with mostly juvenile petty delinquents. Moreover, with a high impunity rate of nearly 95 percent for homicides, killing in Honduras has become an activity without consequences. The latest state's response is with re-militarization of security, highlighting the dilemma of the challenges of combatting internal violence and transnational organized crime in a weak state.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AUC	Auto Defensas de Colombia
BLO	Beltran-Leyva organization
CAFTA-DR	Central American Free Trade Agreement- Dominican Republic
CARSI	Central American Regional Security Initiative
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CACM	Central American Common Market
CODEH	Committee for the Protection of Human Rights
CONSUFFAA	Consejo Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas
CES	Cuerpo Especial de Seguridad
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOS	Department of State
DNSEP	Dirección Nacional de Servicios Preventivos
DTO	drug trafficking organization
DIN	Dirección de Investigación Nacional
ECLAC	Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean
EU	European Union
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FUSEP	Fuerzas de Seguridad Publica
GDP	gross domestic product
GOH	Government of Honduras
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IUDOP	Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica
JIATF-S	Joint Inter Agency Task Force-South
JTF-B	Joint Task Force-Bravo
LFM	La Familia Michoacana
LIBRE	Partido Libertad y Refundación
MS-13	Mara Salvatrucha
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy

PAC	Partido Anti-Corrupción (Anti-corruption party)
PL	Partido Liberal (Liberal Party)
PN	Partido Nacional (National Party)
PNC	Policía Nacional Civil de Honduras
PMOP	Military Police for Public Order (Policía Militar para Orden Publico)
OAS	Organization of American States
SEDENA	Secretaria de Defensa Nacional (Mexico)
USNORTHCOM	United States Northern Command
USSOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command
TSE	Tribunal Supremo Electoral de Honduras
TCO	transnational criminal organization
TIGRES	Special Intelligence and Security Response Troops (Tropa de Inteligencia y Grupos de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad)
TOC	transnational organized crime
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) *2014 Global Study on Homicides* cited the Honduras homicide rate as the highest in the world. After a significant decline in homicides from 56 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2002 to 33.6 in 2003, the rate nearly double by 2008, and in 2012 increased to 90.4 per 100,000 (see Table 1).¹ In the last two decades, street gangs have emerged as leading criminal actors responsible for the increase in crime, and in the last decade drug traffickers have increased the use of Honduran ports, airstrips, and roads to transport cocaine.

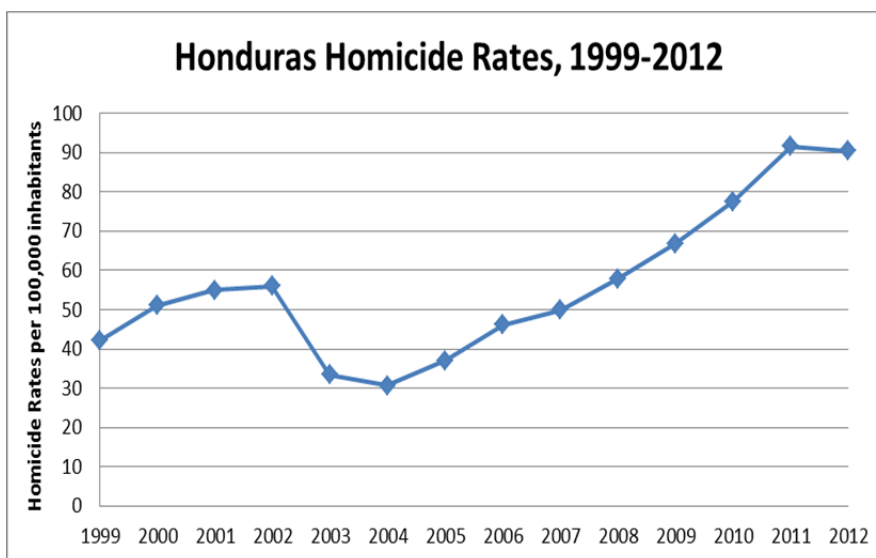


Table 1. Honduras Homicide Rates 1999–2012
(from UNODC, 2014)²

The majority of homicides in Honduras are concentrated in urban areas, especially San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, and La Ceiba. But crime affects the entire country—in 2012, all eighteen departments had higher rates than the global, and the Americas average

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *2013 Global Study on Homicide Trends, Context, Data* (New York, NY United Nations Publications, March 2014), 107.

² UNODC, *2013 Global Study on Homicide*, 126.

(6.9 and 16 per 100,000, respectively).³ The state of Gracias A Dios was the only state to record a homicide rate of less than 23 per 100,000 (see Figure 1).⁴ In addition to the homicide rates, Honduras has some of the highest negative indicators of citizen security and development in Latin America these include the poverty rate, number of gangs, and gang members.⁵

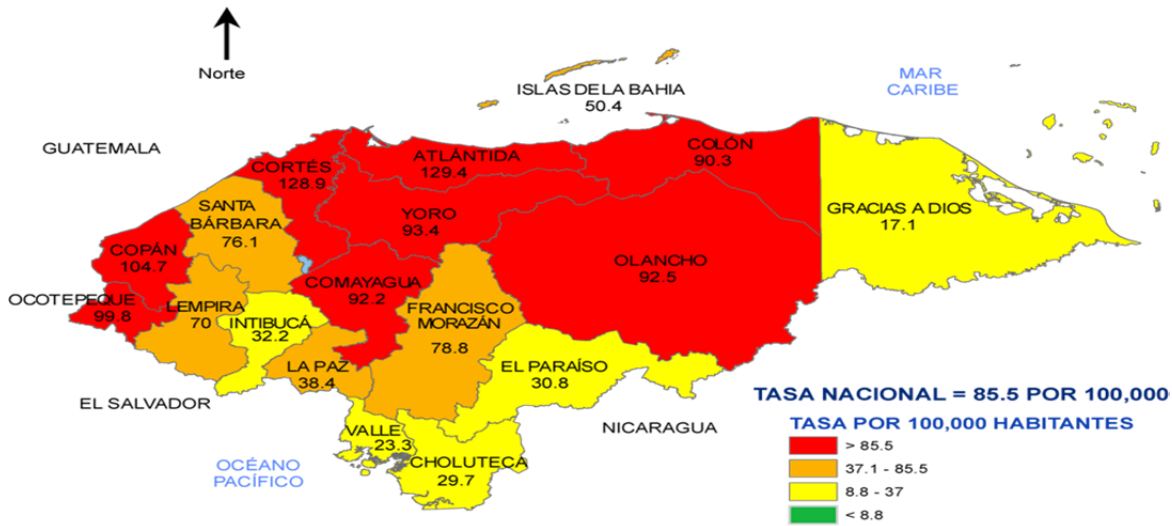


Figure 1. Honduras: Homicides by Department in 2012 (from Universidad Autónoma de Honduras Observatorio de la Violencia, 2012)⁶

Honduras and El Salvador have recorded the highest homicide rates in Latin America yearly since 1995.⁷ Only El Salvador's 1995–1998 rates exceeded Honduras's 91.4 in 2011.⁸ Overall, the security situation for Central America is worrisome, with

³ Ibid., 107.

⁴ Universidad Autónoma de Honduras, Cifras del Observatorio de Violencia, accessed July 03, 2013, <https://www.unah.edu.hn/uploaded/content/category/926831121.pdf>; departments in Honduras is the same as states in the U.S.—their use is interchangeable in this thesis.

⁵ Lirio Gutierrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence State, Marginal Youth, and Insecurity in Honduras* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁶ Dirección de Estadística Policía Nacional/ Universidad Autónoma de Honduras Observatorio de la Violencia, accessed July 3, 2013, <https://www.unah.edu.hn/?art=1152>.

⁷ Mark Ungar, *Policing Democracy Overcoming Obstacles of Citizen Security in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 112.

⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *2011 Global Study On Homicide Trends, Context, Data*, (New York, NY: United Nations Publications, 2012), 115.

death rates at or above the rates recorded during the wars in the 1980s. For instance, the intentional homicide rate in El Salvador during the 1990s was over 40 percent higher than the average deaths due to the war in the 1980s.⁹

In response to the breakdown in public security, the Honduran government instituted zero tolerance policies, adapting the New York City's crime-fighting strategy that reduced crime levels significantly in the mid-1990s. Under zero tolerance, the most mundane of infractions are considered important, and leaving infractions unaddressed is believed to lead to further deterioration and delinquency.

However, the Honduran outcome has not been positive. As a result, Honduran citizens are victimized by gangs, drug traffickers, state armed actors, and freelance criminals. These actors have taken control of territories and through the use of violence, have permanently altered Honduran activities and social behavior. Moreover, the government institutions entrusted to uphold law and order—the police and military—have been corrupted and infiltrated by the criminal gangs and narcotic traffickers. In other words, in Honduras, gangs, organized crime, and state policing institutions all use violence to gain control of territory and, hence the population.¹⁰ This study will seek to explain the exponential rise in violence in Honduras. Additionally, it will chronicle the latest responses to the increased in criminality.

B. IMPORTANCE

While violent crime generally includes murder, aggravated assault, robbery, and rape,¹¹ the research in Honduras are most accurate for murder and probably robbery. Since the late 1990s, Hondurans have been killing each other at the highest per capita rate in the world, and the country regularly holds a spot among the worst in Latin America in

⁹ Dennis Rodgers, "Living in the Shadow of Death Gangs, Violence and Social Order in Urban Nicaragua, 1996–2002," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38, no. 2 (May 2006): 268.

¹⁰ Julie Marie Bunck and Michael Ross Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 258.

¹¹ Gary LaFree, "Declining Violent Crime Rates in the 1990s Predicting Crime Booms and Busts," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25, no. 1 (1999): 146.

this dubious category.¹² Why this is so offers both a confirmation and contradictions to causal explanations of criminality and delinquency. The demographics of crime in Honduras are consistent with findings for other nations as to age, sex, economic status, family dynamics, and settings. Crime is highest among male juveniles—in their developmental years to early adulthood—declining as they age (see Figure 2).¹³ These young males most often come from fragmented or single-parent homes in mostly poor urban environments.¹⁴ But while background may provide a necessary explanation for criminal behavior, it is insufficient in that the majority of the population with the same background does not turn to criminal behavior.

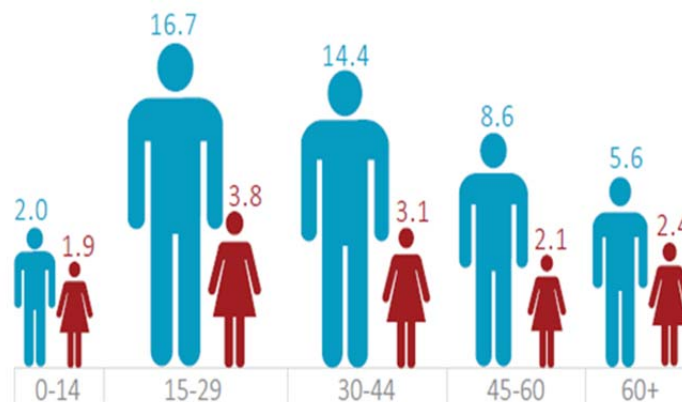


Figure 2. Global homicide rate, by sex and age group, 2012 or latest year
(from UNODC Homicide Statistics, 2014)

The study of crime in Honduras is further complicated by its depictions by the media, popular opinion, and political discourse that have successfully set a misleading narrative. For instance, gangs are often portrayed as the biggest threat to the security in the nation, despite evidence to the contrary.¹⁵ While gangs pose a definite menace to community security, their loose organization and fluid structure means that they do not

¹² UNODC, *2011 Global Study on Crime*, 102–125.

¹³ UNODC, *2013 Global Study on Homicide*, 30.

¹⁴ Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 178.

¹⁵ Ungar, *Policing Democracy*, 112.

pose a structural challenge. On the other hand, Honduran authorities argue that drug traffickers and organized crime are primarily responsible for turning the country into what is widely understood to be a “criminal’s paradise.” Nevertheless, there is a nexus between gangs and drugs. Explaining the rise in violence is important, because it will validate, or provide alternatives, to the hypothesis that gangs, drugs, state institutions, government policies, and structural combine in various ways to account for insecurity. An accurate understanding of the problem can potentially lead to a revision of policies toward violence in both Honduras and the Northern isthmus of Central America.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS

This thesis begins with the following set of problems: the violence in Honduras today is greater than at any point in its history. What explains it? The study of violence has focused on structural factors, state institutions, and the emergence of gangs, organized crime, and drugs trafficking. However, the study in these areas is limited.

The economy is a major structural factor affecting the development and limiting the resources of the state to address insecurity. Nearly twenty-five years ago, Honduras ranked at the bottom among Central American nations in terms of per capita income, employment, literacy, health care, life expectancy, and nutrition. That has not changed—on the contrary the GDP per capita in 2006 was the same as in 1980.¹⁶ The contrast with Nicaragua may be instructive. Although Honduras and Nicaragua share similar poverty levels and size, and yet despite the fact that Nicaragua had a long history of long internal conflicts, Nicaragua has the second lowest homicide rates in the region. Why this is so cannot be explained by the economy or in the failure of consolidation of democracy.¹⁷

A second focus is the role that institutions play in the increase in crime. Honduran institutions—military, police, courts, political parties—ranked among the lowest in terms of citizen’s trust. Corruption is widespread throughout most institutions, making it difficult to conduct the most basic of transactions. State institutions are rife with greed

¹⁶ Alison Acker, *Honduras The Making of a Banana Republic* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), 11.

¹⁷ Dennis Rodgers, “Joining the Gang and Becoming a Broder The Violence of Ethnography,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26, no. 4 (2007) 444–465.

and incompetence. According to scholar John Booth, “the inability of the Honduran government to effectively combat crime led to the increasing public insecurity and the decline of public life.”¹⁸

The armed forces have occupied a position of great influence, often operating without constraints. For a long period, the armed forces operated as a mediator between the Partido Nacional (PN) and Partido Liberal (PL), earning the label as Honduras’s third party. Additionally, the influence extended over the police and security forces at the ports and borders, where a great deal of illicit activity takes place.

A third aspect of the problem are the two new groups that have emerged to challenge the state monopoly of violence and become major actors—the maras (mara and pandilla are Spanish terms used interchangeably, in Honduras, for gang) and drug trafficking organizations. Recently, maras have taken a backseat as attention has shifted to organized crime and the corruption it funds. Although maras take part in the drug trade, it is not clear how significant their involvement is. Unlike the maras, drug traffickers are well organized and appear untouchable in Honduras. This dynamic of maras, organized crime and a malfunctioning state combines to create the current security environment.

Because of the multiple factors offered to explain crime in Central America in general, and in Honduras in particular, a holistic approach to understand the problem is required. On the one hand, structural factors such as poverty, social exclusion, and the breakdown of the family dynamic play a significant role in the rise of violence. On the other hand, institutions such as the police, the military, and the political elites have deliberately manipulated the system to their private benefit, thereby undermining public security. This study argues that a combination of the rise of transnational organized crime—changes in the global illicit trade, mainly cocaine trafficking from the Caribbean to Central America and decline of the major Colombian TCOs and the rise of Mexican TCOs, and the weak internal government security apparatus, all contribute to making Honduras one of the world’s most dangerous places outside of actual war zones.

¹⁸ John A Booth, Christine J. Wade, and Thomas W. Walker, *Understanding Central America Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change*, 5th ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010), 175.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on Honduras is not extensive. Scholars such as Julie Marie Bunck, Michael Ross Fowler, and Lirio Gutierrez Rivera argue that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the region was forgotten. Overall, most of the literature on criminality in Central America has focused on the social, political, and economic processes of development, in particular, neoliberalism and globalization.¹⁹ Recent literature analyzed the emergence of gangs, drug trafficking, and the policing policies the Honduran state enacted in an effort to reduce crime and gain the monopoly of violence. The least studied areas are gangs, drug trafficking, and the role that prisons have played in the increased violence and delinquency.²⁰ This thesis will contribute to the limited literature addressing the rise of violence in Honduras.

Gutierrez Rivera offers one of the most complete assessments of the Honduran violence, by examining the link between security, violence, and territory. He argues that “the failed security policies—as well as the persistence of social violence, crime, and delinquency—are linked to the Honduran state’s difficulty with ordering national territory.”²¹ That inability to control national territory disenfranchises the population and explains the landscape of violence.

Most studies about Honduran criminal actors begin with maras. The two major gangs in Honduras, the *Mara Salvatrucha* (commonly known as the MS-13), and the 18th Street gang (Calle Dieciocho or Barrio 18), trace their origins to Los Angeles.²² Some scholars argue that gangs are taking over, and that unless authorities take corrective action, the mara problem will worsen.²³ According to Ana Arana’s alarming article, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” gangs have become a major actor in

¹⁹ Rodgers, “Joining the Gang and Becoming a Broder,” 444–465.

²⁰ Lirio Gutierrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence State, Marginal Youth, and Insecurity in Honduras* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²¹ Ibid., 10.

²² Thomas C. Bruneau, Lucia Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner, *Maras Gang Violence and Security in Central America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), 1.

²³ Ana Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 3 (May–June 2005) 98–110; Max G. Manwaring, “Street Gangs The New Urban Insurgency” (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2005).

Central America with potential security implications for the region and even the United States.

While the literature on gangs in Central America describes them as a growing problem, it also emphasizes that their importance in overall crime in the region is unclear. Authorities have a difficult time assessing the number of gangs and gang members and their participation in crimes. According to Joanna Mateo, although the gangs in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador share names and origins, they are localized and take on a specific country dynamic. Each of these countries has its own unique gang story.²⁴

Gangs are a complex phenomenon to which there are no easy explanations or solutions. Gang members are both the perpetrators and the victims of the violence. With crime and delinquency among the major concerns for the populace, a preference for tougher penalties has been a common trend. Studies of gangs focus on the effects of structural problems—the relationship of economic factors, social classes and the political environment.²⁵ Likewise, migration, family disintegration and the culture of resolving differences through violence are part of the explanations offered.²⁶

Jose Miguel Cruz presents a cross-country comparative study to explain the divergent outcomes in criminal violence in Central America.²⁷ His particular focus is to explain why Nicaragua has less violent crimes than does its neighbors Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. According to Cruz, several factors are at play, the high homicide rates in the northern isthmus can be traced in great part to the state. The state institutions have played a major role in the reproduction of criminal violence and the

²⁴ Joanna Mateo, “Street Gangs of Honduras.” In *Maras Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, edited by Bruneau, Thomas, Lucia Dammert and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press Austin, 2011), 87.

²⁵ Maria L. Santacruz Giralt, and José Miguel Cruz Alas, “Las Maras en El Salvador Maras y pandillas en Centroamérica Vol. I (2001) 24, Universidad de Centroamérica, accessed June 2013, <http://www.uca.edu.sv/publica/iudop/libros/libromarasypandillasencentroamericavol.I.pdf>

²⁶ Jose Miguel Cruz, “Government Responses and the Dark Side of Gang Suppression in Central America,” in *Maras Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, edited by Bruneau, Thomas, Lucia Dammert and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press Austin, 2011), 137.

²⁷ Jose Miguel Cruz, “Government Responses,” 137.

development of groups responsible for it. The faulty security institutions are not only inefficient and indifferent to crime, but also participate in the reproduction of criminal violence.²⁸ With Honduran levels of crime significantly higher today, and with Nicaragua similar poverty levels and relative low homicide rates, the comparison undermines the importance of the economy or in the failure of consolidation of democracy as explanations for the rise in homicides.²⁹

The surge in crime beginning at the turn of the twenty-first century had several causes (see Table 1). In 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated and set back the Honduran economy, displacing thousands of people and causing approximately \$3 billion in damage. According to emigration statistics, 61.4 percent of all Hondurans living outside the country in 2006 left the country between 1998 and 2005 to escape the physical and economic devastation.³⁰ Hondurans continue to migrate to the United States; today the reasons have expanded beyond economic.

The migration of Hondurans to the United States is in contrast to the patterns of migration from Nicaraguans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans. Overall, the immigration from these countries has increased since 1970. That year, fewer than 20,000 immigrants from each of these countries resided in the United States. In contrast, “in 2009, that number had grown to a quarter million Nicaraguans, half a million Hondurans, three-quarters of a million Guatemalans and more than a million Salvadorans.”³¹ From 1990 to 2009, Hondurans were the fastest growing population of Central Americans in the United States. “By 2009, there were 63 Hondurans immigrants living in the United States per 1,000 people in Honduras,” surpassing Guatemala’s 57 per 1,000.³²

The Honduran migration being the most recent, in combination with the increased U.S. security on the borders and immigration enforcement, means Hondurans have been

²⁸ Ibid., 24.

²⁹ Dennis Rodgers, “Joining the Gang and Becoming a Broder,” 444–465.

³⁰ Mateo, “Street Gangs of Honduras,” 93.

³¹ Sarah Blanchard, Erin R. Hamilton, Nestor Rodriguez, and Hirotoshi Yoshioka, “Shifting Trends in Central American Migration A Demographic Examination of Increasing Honduran-U.S. Immigration and Deportation,” *The Latin Americanist* 55, no. 4 (2011) 65.

³² Ibid.

deported in larger numbers (see Figure 3). The Hondurans' shorter time span in the United States has made their assimilation more difficult, exposing them for deportations.

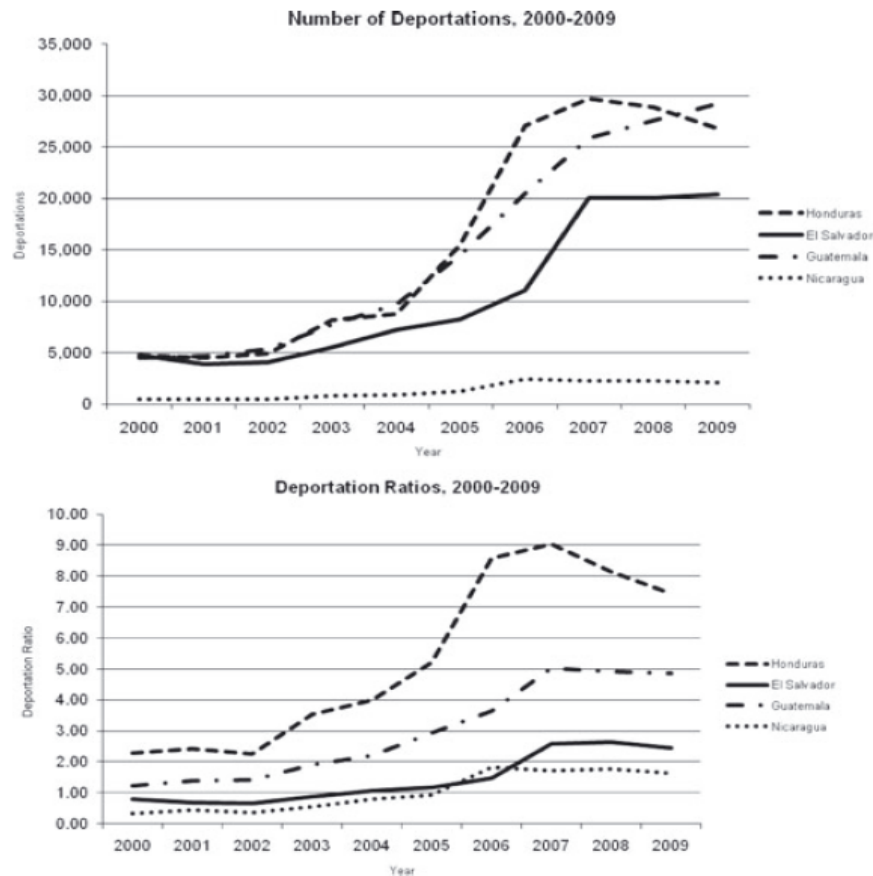


Figure 3. Number of Deportations and Deportation Ratios, 2000–2009, of Hondurans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans from the United States (from Blanchard, etc., *Shifting Trends*, 2011).³³

In fiscal year 2010, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained 363,064 aliens and the average detention population was 30,085. Hondurans accounted for 8 percent of the detention bed days, trailing only Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala (36 percent, 11 percent, and 10 percent, respectively).³⁴ Between fiscal year 2007 to

³³ Blanchard, “Shifting Trends in Central American Migration,” 67.

³⁴ Alison Siskin, “Immigration-Related Detention Current Legislative Issues” (CRS Report for Congress, January 12, 2012), 12.

2009, 87,551 Hondurans were deported from the United States and of those an estimated 17,833 were classified as “criminal deportees.”³⁵ While many of the deportees do not merit the definition of criminal, a growing number do have violent pasts, prior felonies, and gang ties. By the time that some of these immigrants were deported from the United States, they had acquired backgrounds in criminal and gang activities. Complicating things further, the immigration laws that deported these gang members also prohibited U.S. officials from disclosing the criminal backgrounds of the deportees to their home countries.³⁶ This was Central America’s version of *Marielitos*; in this instance, with the United States exporting criminals to its weaker allies without coordination or planning.

These returning gang members gained a stronghold in Honduras.³⁷ While deportations brought the Los Angeles gang culture to Honduras, deportations are not a major factor for the growth of maras in their continued prominence in the criminal landscape.³⁸

When the government initiated a zero-tolerance policy targeting gang members, the prison population skyrocketed. The deplorable prison conditions, where the well-being of the inmates is of little consequence, simply added to the problem. The food, health, and sleeping quarters are a source of daily contestation among the inmate population and the prison administrators and guards. In an anthropological study of gangs in the city of El Progreso, Department of Yoro, Misael Castro and Marlon Carranza reveal how prisoners often joined gangs to survive. Prison super-gangs are composed of smaller *clikas* (cliques, sets, ranging from a few to 40 members). These prison subgroups interacted with cliques from other barrios belonging to their affiliated super-gang, creating national networks.

³⁵ Steven S. Dudley, “Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras,” in Eric L. Olson et al., *Shared Responsibility U.S.-Mexico Policy Options for Confronting Organized Crime* (Washington, DC; San Diego, CA: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Mexico Institute; University of San Diego, Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 83.

³⁶ Kevin Lewis O’Neill, “Delinquent Realities Christianity, Formality, and Security in the Americas,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2011): 341.

³⁷ Mateo, “Street Gangs of Honduras,” 93.

³⁸ Bruneau, *Maras Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, 14.

With the MS-13 and 18th Street members incarcerated in the same prison, controlling territory inside the prisons became key for survival and power. Gang members became closer to the gang as they were more dependent on them for protection. Where the street became the initiation for gang indoctrination, prisons intensified that experience as critical for survival. Prisons, in part, shaped the development of gang members inside and outside their walls.³⁹ How much influence the imprisoned gang leaders have over the activities of their *clikas* and *homies* outside of prison, is unclear. El Salvador has worked to negotiate gang truce, an experiment that has in part reduced the homicide rate by 40 percent in 2012.⁴⁰ The truce was brokered by religious leaders, local government and the international community. In May 2013, Honduras had a truce agreement, but the results have been negligible. Part of the explanations for the variance is that gangs in Honduras are not as hierarchical as Salvadoran gangs, therefore gang leaders do not have the same influence.⁴¹ Moreover, the criminal landscape in El Salvador is not as affected by the drug trade and Salvadoran institutions are among the most trusted and strongest in Central America.

Another major area of recent study is the increase of drug trafficking through Central America. According to the Department of State statistics, cocaine coming into the United States via Central America rose in volume from 1 percent in 2007 to 95 percent in 2010.⁴² The numbers reflect the preference of drug traffickers to use the land-based route, short aerial flights, and maritime littoral of Central America. In Honduras, the numerous ports, clandestine air strips, and established land routes to Guatemala make it an ideal transit for traffickers. Drug traffickers utilize the same infrastructure used for most of the nation's legal trade. San Pedro Sula, where a large concentration of criminality takes place, was also the source of two-thirds of the Honduras GDP in 1999.⁴³

³⁹ Misael Castro and Marlon Carranza, "Las Maras en Honduras Maras y Pandillas en Centroamérica Vol. I (2001): 298; Universidad de Centroamérica, accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.uca.edu.sv/publica/iudop/libros/libromarasypandillasencentroamericavol.I.pdf>.

⁴⁰ UNODC, *2013 Global Study On Homicide*, 34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴² Cited in Nigel Inkster and Virginia Comolli, *Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States The Problems of Prohibition* (New York: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012), 98.

⁴³ Inkster and Comolli, *Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States*, 98.

Julie Bunck and Michael Fowler note that Honduras has always been “poverty-stricken” but the manner in which the Honduran drug trade has evolved remains largely unexplored.⁴⁴ Part of the explanation for the lack of research is due to the role the military plays in police functions, bringing into question the validity of the military and police reports. According to Bunck and Fowler, the Honduran armed forces have influenced the evolution of the drug trade in Honduras. In charge of policing the airports and ports, the armed forces have been linked to drug traffickers at least since the 1970s. Despite cases brought against military officers, few have been convicted, and even in the rare instance this happens, their sentences are reduced or their convictions are overturned.⁴⁵

Ricardo Maduro was elected president of Honduras in 2001, after a campaign in which he promised to get tough on crime. Maduro’s policies began with zero tolerance, policies carried out by police in crime-ridden areas. In 2003, *mano dura*—anti-gang repressive policies, meaning “strong fist” or “strong hand”—were introduced, adding to zero tolerance by targeting members of the *maras*.⁴⁶ Tough policing was followed by legislative action with the passage of the reform of article 332 of the penal code, known as *Ley Antimaras*. Under this anti-gang law, membership in street gangs became a crime, with punishment ranging up to fines of \$10,000 and nine years in prison.⁴⁷

Despite initial success in reducing criminality, the long-term results of *mano dura* have been disastrous. The homicide rate has nearly tripled, and gangs have surged in numbers, and become more violent. Moreover, organized crime operates freely, largely unhindered. Nor do they suffer from a dearth of recruits. Death squads and *sicarios* (contract killers) have become part of the violent landscape. In addition, the police and military are alleged to take part in extrajudicial killing, and at the very minimum, turning a blind eye to the criminals. In 2002, according to Casa Alianza/ Covenant House, a NGO that works in rehabilitation and defense of street children, 556 youths under the age of

⁴⁴ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 258.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁶ Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, *Maras Gang Violence and Security*, 259.

⁴⁷ Gutierrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence*, 85.

twenty-three were assassinated. *Carros de la muerte* (death cars) allegedly killed 47 of them.⁴⁸

Earlier explanations for the problems of Honduras include the failed transition from authoritarian regime to a consolidated democracy. This view argues that this accounts for weak institutions and underdevelopment. Scholars have utilized cross-national comparison to explain the divergent outcomes, and homicide rates are often the matrix most cited to measure the effectiveness of the state. In the case of Honduras, the question turns to how is it that a country that did not experience a civil war, like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, has the highest levels of crime?⁴⁹ The comparisons have revealed that the outcomes in Central America, and the Northern isthmus in particular, do not lead to a predictive outcome, based on the internal wars, transition to democracy, and neoliberal reforms. What is undisputed is that the Honduran security reality is bleak, with no improvement in sight.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis will utilize a single case study of Honduras to analyze the state's failure in public security and attempt to answer the proposed thesis question. It will utilize the sources outlined in the literature review, in addition to public documents on gangs and organized crime from government, non-governmental organizations relating to the region, and Honduras specifically. For statistical data, it will depend on international organizations, such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Developmental Bank, the United Nations, and reputable educational and professional institutions conducting research in Honduras. It will also utilize the latest articles from the New York Times and Honduran media outlets and national newspapers.

This thesis will seek to analyze the increase in violence and the Honduran government actions to combat it. First, it will analyze the major factors and actors responsible for the increase in violence. How has transnational organized crime affected

⁴⁸ Adrienne Pine, *Working Hard, Drinking Hard On Violence and Survival in Honduras* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 57.

⁴⁹ Rodgers, "Joining the Gang and Becoming a Broder," 445.

the violence levels in Honduras? How has corruption, impunity, and the weak institutional capacity exacerbated the problem? Second, this thesis will analyze the effectiveness of the government crime-fighting strategy, specifically militarization. The goal of this research is to explain the exponential rise of violence in Honduras, and subsequently identify the driving forces and factors behind the insecurity in the country.

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II. MILITARIZATION: THE STATE RESPONDS TO RISE IN VIOLENCE

In one of his last acts before his presidential term expired in January 2014, President Porfirio Lobo signed legislation to create two new security forces: the TIGRES (Tropa de Inteligencia y Grupos de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad) and a Military Police for Public Order (Policía Militar de Orden Publico, PMOP). With the increase in violence and crime throughout Honduras, the last four Honduran presidential administrations have seen the country's security situation deteriorate. The major questions that Hondurans pose are whether this current strategy will work, and whether these rebranded forces will be up to the daunting task of fighting the Honduran criminal element? For international observers and human rights activists, the creation of these units brings back memories of phases of militarization that many believe are to blame for the stunted development of the state and security forces. Indeed, this repeat militarize strategy is a desperate reaction to a situation that has reached crisis levels, and a population demanding that its government do something to reverse the trend. The concern is that the conceived strategy will further militarize the Honduran state, undermining democracy and due process of the law. This thesis argues that militarization of the Honduran political system in conjunction with the absence of comprehensive reforms to the criminal justice system is one of the major factors why Honduras has been, is, and most likely will continue to be in a security crisis. This chapter seeks to explain the tendency to use the armed forces and military-type units to curb violence, and the ramifications of using such units in a state where there is no culture of adhering to the rule of law.

In presenting the issue of militarization, this chapter will utilize the development of militarization since the dictatorship of Tiburcio Carias Andino (1933–1948). First, it will provide an overview of militarization in Honduras. Second, it will analyze the creation and proposed operational and tactical use of TIGRES and PMOP. Third, it will look at the Honduran political history and how, since 1954, the armed forces have been

the ultimate state arbiter. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the limits of militarization when the rest of the crime-fighting system is broken.

A. THE MILITARIZATION OF SECURITY

Honduras has many problems. This poverty-stricken and crime-ridden nation has dealt with declining quality of life since the transition to democratic rule in 1981. Always poor, but historically more secure than its neighbors, Honduras is now in the bottom of most categories in a region characterized by internal wars, poverty and violence. Unable to fix the long-term problems of underdevelopment, Honduras has been incapable of providing its citizens with basic services and needs. Repeatedly, the military has been called on to resolve political differences between the two major political parties and, at present, they are the main state institution in charge of directing the war against crime.

Kirk Bowman, in his examination of Honduras militarization in the period of 1954–63, defines the term as “the expansion or relative size of some integral part, scope or mission of the armed forces, and may be observed in the size of the budget, number of soldiers, training, equipping, war readiness and institutionalization of the armed forces.”⁵⁰ Militarization in the context of this chapter refers to the utilization of the armed forces and para-military units for public security and the expansion of their mission that includes training, equipping, and overseeing the strategic, operational, and tactical use of security forces.

Raul Benitez and Arturo Sotomayor highlight that in the Mesoamerican region, comprised of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, the histories of the militaries are not forged in fighting external wars.⁵¹ The threat to the region has shifted from regional counterinsurgency conflicts to internal criminal gangs, and institutionalized corruption exacerbated in part by the increase in drug trafficking. The region’s security situation is primarily “intermestic,” where the

⁵⁰ Kirk S. Bowman, “The Public Battles over Militarisation and Democracy in Honduras,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 541.

⁵¹ Raul Benitez and Arturo Sotomayor, “The Mesoamerican Dilemma External Insecurity, Internal Vulnerability,” in Paul Kenny, Mónica Serrano, and Arturo Sotomayor, *Mexico’s Security Failure Collapse into Criminal Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 183.

causes of insecurity are internal but the effects are transnational. In this context, the actions of one government are fruitless, and the actions and inactions of other states can lead to further deterioration in security. While there is collaboration on some security aspects, especially near border towns, the region's security apparatuses operate independently. According to Benitez and Sotomayor, this is due in part to the fact that the military have yet fully to accept civilian control and lack incentives for regional cooperation.⁵²

Honduras and El Salvador are the two countries in the region that have small border disputes. The consequence of their arming to resolve them simply increases the sense of insecurity in their neighbors who, in turn, are forced to respond in kind by augmenting their military arsenal.⁵³ But apart from rival border claims of the Conejo Island off the Gulf of Fonseca and memories of the conflict of 1969 so called "Soccer War" and Cold War, militarization in Central America today does not arise principally from interstate conflict.

B. TIGRES

In Honduras, one problem is impunity. For instance, of the 7,172 homicides in 2012, only 982 resulted in detention and charges.⁵⁴ The numbers demonstrate but one example of the problems caused by poor police recruitment, training, and capacity. In charge of covering 112,492 square kilometers, an area the approximate size of Tennessee, divided into 18 states (departamentos) and 298 municipalities, the police are overwhelmed (see Figure 4). Honduras has 151 police per 100,000 people, which is far below the recommended UN average of 280, and the international average of 225.⁵⁵

⁵² Benitez and Sotomayor, "The Mesoamerican Dilemma," 184.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ RESDAL, "Public Security Index Central America Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama," (2013), 88, www.resdal.org/ing.

⁵⁵ Daniel Sabet, "Police Reform in Mexico Advances and Persistent Obstacles," in Eric L. Olson et al., *Shared Responsibility U.S.-Mexico Policy Options for Confronting Organized Crime* (Washington, DC; San Diego, CA; Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Mexico Institute: University of San Diego, Trans-Border Institute, 2010), 248.



Figure 4. Map of Honduras (from CRS, 2013)⁵⁶

The state's new strategy to deal with the deteriorating situation is through the creation of an elite police force named TIGRES. This unit calls for the training and deployment of 300 or so members to patrol the cities of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. This unit, which falls under the Secretary of Security, was created to strengthen the national police. In 2013, Porfirio Lobo proposed expanding the national police to a total of 20,000, which would almost double the current manning of 12,805.⁵⁷ But, with the inability to reform the police and the widespread corruption in police ranks, the initiative did not gain any traction.

⁵⁶ Peter J. Meyer, *Honduras-U.S. Relations* (CRS Report for Congress July 24, 2013).

⁵⁷ RESDAL, "Public Security Index in Central America," 99.

According to Marco Caceres, the creation of TIGRES brings back memories of former elite troop units in Honduras who were involved with extra-judicial killings and human rights abuses. In the 1980s, the Batallón 3-16 was responsible for the disappearance of many Hondurans, whose only alleged crime was to oppose state policies.⁵⁸

Another infamous unit of that era, and one that continues to operate today, is the Cobras. This Special Forces unit is utilized in Honduras in a similar fashion as the federal law enforcement teams in the United States. The Cobras developed a reputation for performing the most dangerous missions, generating both fear and respect among Hondurans. For instance, it was the Cobras, with the assistance of the DEA and U.S. Marshalls, that arrested famous Honduran drug lord Juan Matta Ballesteros in 1988.⁵⁹ In 2009, Cobras caught Fredy Donaldo Marmol Vallejo, alleged leader of the Northern cartel, who had evaded authorities for years.⁶⁰

Yet, because Cobra type units are secretive, only members in the ranks or in command of the security forces and national defense know the missions they conduct. In that context, the fear is that these units may turn the very skills agents deploy to go after notorious criminals that the regular police cannot handle to neutralize government opponents.

In 1998, the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights (CODEH) reported that the practice of killing civilians by the military, police, and death squads outside the purview of the law remained alive. The CODEH cited that 701 people had been killed since 1990; many of the bodies found in fields were mutilated and showed signs of torture.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Pine, *Working Hard, Drinking Hard*, 57.

⁵⁹ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 280.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 290.

⁶¹ Pine, *Working Hard, Drinking Hard*, 57.

Oscar Martinez, a reporter for El Faro online newspaper, describes police agents in Honduras as “macho cops.”⁶² Martinez wrote a story about his ride-along experience with the Honduran police along the border town near El Paraíso. The police chief in charge of the operation was Juan Carlos Bonilla Valladares, better known as El Tigre (see Figure 5). El Tigre personifies the militant view of the Honduras law enforcement and its problems. Bonilla was accused in 2002 by the Honduras police internal affairs section of taking part in a police death squad unit called Los Magníficos. After the head of the internal affairs, Maria Luisa Borjas was relieved of her duties before finishing the investigation, El Tigre was found innocent—his only sanction a \$5,000 fine. When Martinez asked El Tigre whether he had “ever killed someone outside the framework of the law,” El Tigre’s response became famous in Honduras: “There are things a person takes to his grave. All I can say is that I love my country and I will do whatever it takes to defend it, and I have done things to defend it. That’s all I’ll say.”⁶³



Figure 5. Juan Carlos Bonilla Valladares, better known as El Tigre
(from NY Times, 2013)

Martinez was perplexed when his article in which Bonilla never denies wrongdoing, was used to propel Bonilla to become the top cop in Honduras. The macho attitude matters in Honduras, and most public leaders and security officials repeatedly

⁶² Óscar Martínez, “The Macho Cops of Honduras,” The New York Times, March 7, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/08/opinion/hondurass-macho-cops.html>.

⁶³ Ibid.

display that type of demeanor. The name for the new unit and the nickname of Bonilla is not a coincidence—it was during his tenure that the concept and the laws to create it were passed.

The creation of the TIGRES was, in part, because of the perception that the Honduran police are largely corrupt and neither able nor willing to tackle the serious insecurity in the country. In fact, many Honduras allege that the police look the other way and even take part in committing crimes. Cases of police cover-ups, extra-judicial killings, and old-fashioned corruption are daily stories in Honduran news outlets. In 2012, 84 percent of Honduras surveyed expressed little or no trust in the police.⁶⁴

A central aspect of the problem is low police salaries, even in the aftermath of police reforms. Prior to the latest wage increase, the average monthly salary for a policeman was \$350, with some receiving even less. This is barely the minimum monthly wage. Currently, the average salary for 83.2 percent of the force is \$472. For officers (8.1 percent of the force) in the positions of inspection, executive and superior, the average monthly salary is \$734, \$1,494, and \$2,261, respectively.⁶⁵

C. PMOP

While the TIGRES is a small elite unit aimed at strategic targets, PMOP is a supposed to be a bridge between the police and the military (see Figure 6). The unit in concept is a hybrid force, to be trained and quartered by the armed forces. To speed up the process, the first 1,000 members came directly from the military ranks. Since then, the PMOP is recruited by combination of Soldiers and new recruits. The target strength is 5,000 members by the end of 2014.

⁶⁴ RESDAL, “Public Security Index in Central America,” 99.

⁶⁵ Ibid.



Figure 6. PMOP in Colonia Flor del Campo of Comayagüela
(from El Heraldo.hn, 2014)

According to the commanders of the armed forces in charge of the training and utilization, PMOP officers are selected from the best members of the military, and the selection criteria call for minimum requirements for height and a sixth-grade education. These new agents must also undergo psychological testing and pass a polygraph test. With the police unable to deal with violence, and the military constitutionally constrained from performing a policing role, the PMOP is the state's latest answer.

Recent police reforms include making it mandatory for all members of the police to go through vetting. As a result, several officers were dismissed, while some left voluntarily. But the constitutionality of the reform was brought to the Supreme Court, who declared that the reform violated the officer's due process. The decision of the judges was viewed as another obstacle by the leaders in parliament and the executive, who then suspended the judges.

The issue of military police was a hotly debated topic in the recent November presidential election. In January 27, 2014 Juan Orlando Hernandez was officially sworn for a four-year term as the President of Honduras. A candidate from the Partido Nacional and the president of the Congress, President Orlando Hernandez ran on a platform of security and jobs, with the creation of the PMOP as a major part of his strategy to fight

crime. The popular support, in part, helped the PN regain the presidential palace again. An August 2013 poll, conducted by Honduran firm Paradigma, cited that 70 percent of the people supported the creation of the policía militar.⁶⁶

For the new members of the policía militar, the government has put in several incentives. Once selected, the new agents receive a 100 percent increase of their basic military monthly salary and an additional 20 percent bonus for good performance. The added salary is on top of the popular support the units have received during public displays, and in the barrios and cities to which the first 1,000 agents have been sent. There is no criterion that has been made public as to what constitutes good performance. Nor is the oversight process of the PMOP clear. With Colombia's false-positive scandal in mind, which is seen as a result of an ill-conceived incentive structure that rewarded questionable at best and even criminal activity at the worst, Hondurans are aware of the possible side effects.

For academics who have studied Honduras and Latin America, militarization is not a new concept. It is almost a *déjà-vu*. In the Honduran case, Kirk Bowman examined the process of militarization in Honduras from 1954 to 1963. At that time, the debate centered on whether Honduras needed to have a military. Costa Rica was in the process of eliminating the military as an institution and Hondurans were discussing doing the same. But 1954 brought critical events that shaped the future of Honduras: the great banana strike, the utilization of Honduran territory to launch an invasion against Guatemalan President Arbenz, and the United States and Honduras's signing of the Bilateral Treaty of Military Assistance.⁶⁷ The existence of the Honduran military and its role in internal and regional conflict was shaped from thereafter. In 1952, with the help of the United States, the Francisco Morazán Military Academy produced its first officers.

The problems of today have changed little. The lessons from the past reveal that militarization weakened state capacity by challenging the executive and legislative

⁶⁶ "Honduras to Decide If Military Police or Gangsters Run the Streets," *GlobalPost*, accessed March 13, 2014, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/131122/honduras-election-military-police-violence>.

⁶⁷ Bowman, "The Public Battles over Militarisation and Democracy in Honduras," 544.

authority. Moreover, it weakened and undermined the judiciary and budgetary process.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, it further tilted the power relations to the elites, a divide that remains alive today.

J. Mark Ruhl studied the civil military relations in Honduras. He says that in 1996 most Latin American armed forces had returned to their barracks, while retaining significant political and institutional autonomy.⁶⁹ The militaries were granted broad jurisdiction over internal security and were left largely free of civilian interference. The inability of civilians to force the armed forces to submit to democratic control resulted in the belief that the democratic system survived at the sufferance of the military. This has been the case in Honduras, which until 1998 had begun to see their power challenged.

The low economic development (\$637 GDP per capita in 1996), and high degree of political dominance exercised by the Honduras armed forces, have contributed to a lack of institutionalized civilian tradition in the country's politics from the early 1960s through the 1980s when civilian rule was reestablished once again.⁷⁰

Ruhl argued in 1996 that despite the power of the Honduran armed forces at that time, their position was already eroding. The lack of security threats in the region, changes in U.S. foreign policy and transformation in the Honduran society provided grounds for optimism that the country may become less militarized.⁷¹ That changed, however, when criminality began to rise in the late 1990s and when Maduro, from the PN, took office the profile of the armed forces was raised once again.

D. AN HISTORICAL TAKE ON THE MILITARY

Since independence, Honduran politicians have been in a constant struggle for money, power, and patronage. The constitution and rules established were often ignored

⁶⁸ Bowman, "The Public Battles over Militarisation and Democracy in Honduras," 560.

⁶⁹ J. Mark Ruhl, "Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 33.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 34

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

or not enforced. The military came into the political scene only after the mid-1950s, when a professional military institution was born.

The creation of the military as an institution began during the dictatorship of Tiburcio Carias Andino (1933–1948). With the assistance of the United States, schools for basic training began instructing officers and enlisted personnel in the 1940s. In 1954, the same year that the U.S.-Honduran military signed a bilateral treaty, the armed forces organic law defined the mission as defense of national sovereignty and public order.

The military intervened in the political arena several times after 1954. They ousted Julio Lozano in 1956, after he had seized power when the National Party-controlled congress prevented Liberal Party candidate Galvez from taking office. The military subsequently relinquished power to Ramon Villeda Morales in 1957. Under his command Honduras passed laws on social security, labor, and agrarian sector as well as signing the Central American Common Market (CACM) accord. In addition to facing the challenges of developing the poorest country in Central America, Villeda had to contend with a series of attempted coups by elements of the national police and military, prompting his decision to disband the police and create the Guardia Civil to reduce the power of the military.⁷²

After political campaigning in early 1963, in which Liberal candidate Modesto Rodas Alvarado promised to end the constitutional autonomy of the armed forces, the National party and the military carried out a coup in March 1963. The coup enabled the armed forces to abolish the Guardia Civil and make the Honduran military the country's most powerful political force. From 1963 to 1971, Air Force General Oswaldo Lopez Arellano ruled Honduras in collaboration with Ricardo Zuniga Agustinus of the National party. Under their command, a new national police force—the Cuerpo Especial de Seguridad (CES)—was established. This fourth branch of the military was used to repress and silence opponents and to shore up the administration's power.⁷³

⁷² Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 161.

⁷³ Ruhl, "Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras," 36.

Popular resentment of the military emerged as a result of fraudulent elections in 1968, followed by the defeat of the Honduran military in the 1969 “Soccer War” against El Salvador. In 1971, labor organizations and business groups successfully pressured Lopez to make way for a bipartisan government. General Lopez, however, retained command of the 8,000 strong military.⁷⁴

Honduran groups that formed in the late 1950s and 1960s—peasant, private sector, and reformist labor unions—did not find that the traditional parties represented their interest. The bipartisan government of national unity became divided, mired in corruption, and unable to enact social reforms. In 1972, General Lopez imposed a military government with him in charge, and aligned the goals of the new regime according to the new populist agenda, which included expanding the role of government and agrarian reform.⁷⁵

The support enabled General Lopez to grow the size of the military to 18,500 and he personally monopolized power within the institution. In 1975, Colonel Juan Melgar Castro took command after General Lopez was forced to relinquish authority of the armed forces due to the increased concern over his power. Later that year an internal coup ousted General Lopez from the presidency as well after alleged charges of corruption against him for accepting bribes from United Brands in exchange for a reduction in the banana export tax. Colonel Juan Melgar became president and Colonel Policarpo Paz Garcia the chief of the armed forces. These conservatives and military hard-liners ended the military’s intervention in populist reforms. In 1978, Paz Garcia overthrew Melgar via another coup.⁷⁶ By this time, the military had lost much of its public support and private sector support, after yet more allegations of corruption and bad economic policies surfaced.

Despite the political factionalism, and military division, and the lack of economic progress, in contrast to the 1980s and thereafter, “there were no death squads, no

⁷⁴ Ruhl, “Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras,” 36.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

systematized tortures, and no rash of disappearances,” while the press remained relatively free.⁷⁷ This period also coincided with the fall of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua in 1979, and pressures from the United States for armed forces to leave power.

The military negotiated certain privileges prior to relinquishing political power. They retained veto over cabinet appointments, control over internal and external security policy, and perhaps more importantly for shaping the future development, no investigations of the military to include corruption or human rights violations occurred.⁷⁸ The military retained autonomy of the selection process of the head of the armed forces and the president could not name or remove the commander. The Consejo Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas (CONSUFFAA) composed of heads of the Army, Air Force and Navy, submitted a list of three names from which Congress made its selection.

The military grew stronger as a result of military aid from Washington, which increased from \$3.9 million in 1980 to \$77.5 million in 1984,⁷⁹ totaling \$174 million between 1981 and 1985, in exchange for assistance against the counterinsurgency in Nicaragua and El Salvador.⁸⁰ In total, the United States provided over \$1.6 billion in military and economic aid to Honduras in the 1980s.⁸¹

General Gustavo Alvarado Martinez, trained in Argentina as a cadet, applied “dirty war” tactics he learned there against anyone suspected of communism. The special unit Batallón 3–16, the Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones (DNI), and Fuerzas de Seguridad Publica (FUSEP) used torture and acted as death squads to eliminate alleged Honduran communists and guerilla sympathizers. At that time, labor, student, and peasant organizations were prime targets of these units. The death squads, which by 1983

⁷⁷ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 162.

⁷⁸ Ruhl, “Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras,” 38.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Thomas M. Leonard, *The History of Honduras* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), 158.

⁸¹ Mark P. Sullivan, “Honduras Political and Economic Situation and U.S. Relations” (CRS Report for Congress, 2006), 4.

also included Nicaraguan exiles, made political disappearances and murders commonplace.⁸²

Civilian leaders and a fearful population were no match for the armed forces on the one hand, yet did not oppose measures that gave the military more power and autonomy. The biggest challenge came from within the institution. In 1984, General Alvarez was ousted through an internal coup, and the new leadership began to question Honduran assistance to the contras and the use of Honduras as a training ground for Salvadoran military. From the early 1950s through 1979, more than 1,000 Honduran personnel received U.S. training in counterinsurgency and “national security.”⁸³ The size of the Honduran military grew to 26,000 in 1986 and became better trained as a result of joint U.S. training exercises (see Figure 7). The military stepped in after President Suazo Cordova sought to remain in power past the one-term limit.

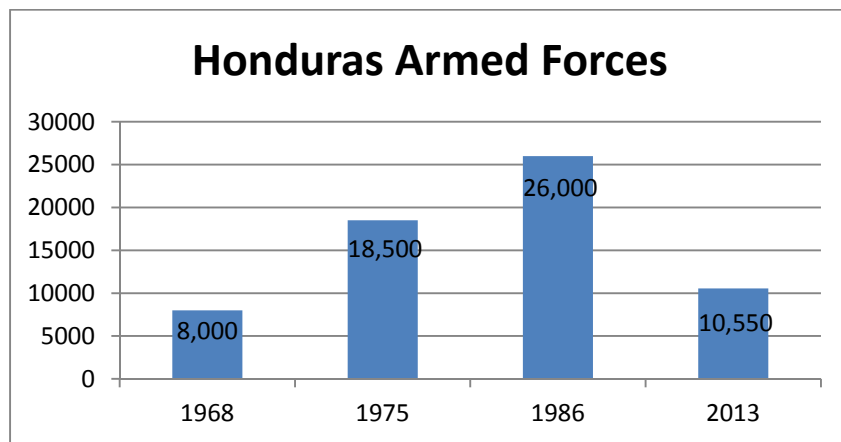


Figure 7. Honduras Armed Forces (after J. Ruhl, 1996, and RESDAL 2013).

In 1986 CONSUFEE replaced Lopez Reyes with General Humberto Regalado Hernandez. Hernandez tolerated and allegedly encouraged corruption. He was alleged to have stolen large sums of public money for his personal use, as well as becoming

⁸² Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 163.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 161.

involved in the international drug trade.⁸⁴ Because of prior arrangements providing the military autonomy from civilian intervention into its internal affairs, military personnel engaged in drug trafficking and human right abuses in the full knowledge that they could not be prosecuted. It can be argued, the impunity problems that Honduras suffers from today stem from this era when neither public officials nor the military were called to account.

Mark Rosenberg states that in the government of Liberal Jose Azcona de Hoyo (1986–1990), it was the military and the U.S. Embassy who negotiated security and foreign policy issues directly. Throughout the 1980s, the civilian politicians were factionalized, weak, and often relied upon the military to arbitrate their disputes.⁸⁵ In 1985, congress dismissed five of the nine Supreme Court judges for alleged corruption. Their true intent, however, was to stack the court to their benefit because it held the decision to nominate the president should a majority vote of 50 percent of the popular vote not take place. The military had to step in and brokered an agreement that gave the presidency to Azcona despite the fact that he received fewer votes (27.5 percent) than PL candidate Rafael Leonardo Callejas (42.6 percent). The terms of the agreement gave Azcona the presidency because the PN candidates received 51.6 percent of the vote combined and he had the majority among them.⁸⁶

One of the major questions today is why Honduras, which did not have an internal war, has so many crime problems? In this context of the political divisions, the intervention of external interests, and military rule, a second important question to ask is why Honduras did not evolve a revolutionary movement as did its neighbors. In fact, “in the 1960s, Honduras gave birth to the most militant and, before long, the best-organized peasant movement in Central America.”⁸⁷ Moreover, in the mid-1980s, it was estimated

⁸⁴ Ruhl, “Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras,” 39.

⁸⁵ Mark B. Rosenberg, “Narcos and Politicos The Politics of Drug Trafficking in Honduras,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, 1988, 152.

⁸⁶ Leonard, *The History of Honduras*, 165.

⁸⁷ Steven Volk, “Honduras: On the Border of War,” in *Trouble in Our Backyard: Central America and the United States in the Eighties*, edited by Martin Diskin (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 203–243. Quoted in Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 171.

that four main guerrilla organizations operated in Honduras with a membership totaling about six hundred people. Jeff Goodwin argues that the Honduran relatively “semi-openness” of the military regimes beginning in the 1960s and most importantly the moderate military rule of the 1970s that sought to enact land reform are major reasons why revolutionary movements there never got off the ground.⁸⁸

According to J. Mark Ruhl, during the 1990s four major developments undermined the position of the military. First, the end of the Cold War and removal of communism as a real or inflated threat prompted the questioning of the size of the military. Second, the U.S. policy change toward accepting the allegations against the military as a corrupt institution resulted in Washington calling for the reduction of the military budget. Third, civil society became more engaged and organizations previously repressed began to exposed military wrongdoing. Fourth, the private sector, one of the strongest groups in Honduran civil society, changed from a supporter of the military to one of its major critics.⁸⁹

E. CONCLUSION

In sum, do desperate times call for desperate measures? The answer to this question may not lie on the long-term effect of the new security paradigm in Honduras. There is a shortage of innovation and creative ideas in the country. Unfortunately, the inability to control the criminal sector has made the majority of the population accomplices to the re-militarization of society. According to Buck and Fowler, the Honduran military, with their privileged position in society, have enjoyed the freedom to act without consequence.⁹⁰

A major reason for opting to use the military and create TIGRES and policía militar are the organized crime elements in Honduras. Drug traffickers and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) are overpowering state authorities. Often, the criminals have more firepower, better logistics, or just simply corrupt or coerce anyone to take part

⁸⁸ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 170.

⁸⁹ Ruhl, “Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras,” 42.

⁹⁰ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 263.

in their business. Numerous articles printed and news outlets of Latin America, Europe, Al Jazeera, among others, have run stories about how Honduras is at the mercy of the gangs and drug traffickers.

Furthermore, the shift of drug trafficking routes has made Honduras the latest battleground. The International Narcotics Control Strategy Report estimates that 79 percent of the cocaine that makes its way from South America to North America every year—that is \$30 billion of the \$38 billion—passes through Honduras. This amount is approximately ten times as high as the Honduran state budget and more than the \$18 billion national GDP.⁹¹

The utilization of these forces raises more questions than answers. In part, that is one of the reasons why the legislation creating the *policía militar* was questioned on the constitutional level, requiring 85 percent votes from the opposition to reform the law.

In the meantime, the police remain mostly unreformed. The Tigres have yet to materialize significant results, and the population remains hopeful that PMOP can provide desperately needed security. Most Hondurans today are in agreement with the executive to do whatever is necessary to curb the violence in the country. But, in addition to losing momentum in reforming the police, so has the call to strengthen and depoliticize the judiciary.

Efforts to strengthen the judicial system has lagged behind and not addressed the threats from criminal actors. Without addressing the judicial system, the effects of the new reforms will likely fail because the public is unable to see direct and long-term benefits from the security reforms while crimes go unsolved and unpunished.

The questions remain: does the militarization threaten Honduran democracy? Is the nation going back to a period where the military played a major role in ruling the country? Does adding these units undermine the PNC and the criminal justice system? Is the government at risk that one of the few trusted institutions in the country can succumb to corruption and commit human rights abuses?

⁹¹ Ana-Constantina Kolb, “Outgunned The Honduran Fight Against Transnational Cocaine Traffickers,” *Journal of International Affairs* (Fall, 2012): 213.

With desperation in the air, new leadership in the executive, a congress that calls for reform but which is hamstrung by limited resources, once again the military has become the ultimate arbiter. The military is perhaps the last and only institution in Honduras with significant trust among the population and the firepower to fight against well-armed criminals. That trust will be challenged once the new agents hit the streets to curve the crime trend without violating human rights.

III. MAJOR FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CRIMINAL ENVIRONMENT

What is the best way to test the hypothesis of causes of crime in Honduras; where to begin? One of the ways to reach a greater understanding of the Honduran security problem is through exhausting the possible leads and testing most of the logical hypothesis. The first chapter describes numerous explanations offered by the literature for the increased of violence in Honduras. The options varied from the failure of neoliberalism to family fragmentation, poverty to institutional weakness. This chapter will deconstruct the question at hand beginning with the major factors explaining the increased in violence: transnational organized crime and the different elements associated with it. The study of transnational organized crime ties together drug trafficking, criminal gangs, state weakness, institutional capacity, corruption and impunity. On the one hand, Honduran elected leaders and the Orlando Hernandez administration directs the blame to organized crime; on the other one hand, activists, NGOs and many organizations bring attention to social ills, inequality and government corruption as the real reason for Honduras top ranking in the global homicide (see Table 2). This chapter addresses these main view points, and utilizing literature on these topics in other cases and regions, seeks to provide context into the Honduran problem. It is the argument of this thesis that Honduras security collapse is mainly a result of unresolved internal factors—political, economic, and societal—as well as the influence of foreign factors and actors—the evolution of the global illicit trade. Concentrating on some of these factors is not to dismiss other explanations, but it demonstrates that these are the factors shaping the current criminal landscape.

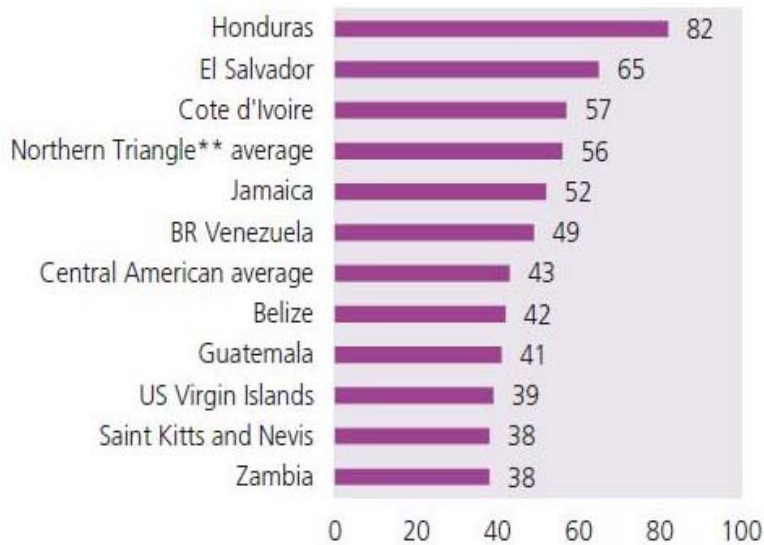


Table 2. Top 10 Highest Homicides per 100,000 People in 2010
(from UNODC, 2010).

Two of the most important areas affecting public security in Honduras are the challenges posed by transnational organized crime and the relative weakness and fragility of the Honduran state to provide basic needs and security to the population. The most effective way of introducing this section's main argument is by splitting the two concepts into their individual components. The first discusses the threat that transnational organized crime presents to Honduras and the global community. How has transnational organized crime evolved and how are criminals "hijacking" the global economy? The second section considers various aspects of state fragility to demonstrate how the net sum of these factors has affected the development of Honduras. Furthermore, it seeks to answer the major obstacles preventing Honduras to change its path of "progress-resistant" state with a history of weak society, and a breakdown in the rule of law. This study contributes to the analyses of the major factors increasing violence in Honduras and to the broader discussion about the prospects of strategy in combatting transnational crime and the challenges of insecurity.

The strength of the state lies in its ability to exert social control, the ability of the state to get people in the society to do what regime leaders want. The strength is measured by resistance to private pressure, and the capacity to change private behavior

and the social structure in intended ways. The weaker a state is in these categories, the stronger the society is and vice-versa. In this correlation, the structures of society affect the state capability. Social and political change in the Third World has downplayed the role of domestic conflict and who gets to decide who makes the rules.⁹² The capacity building then resides in the ability to exert social control and extract resources. These abilities have been exclusive to the military and elites in Honduras, with minimal societal resistance. The rise of the criminal world financed by the resources of the illicit trade has brought to the surface the weakness and deficiency of the Honduran institutions and society.

A. TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Drug traffickers chose Honduras for a reason, exposing the state's unresolved internal issues and weak foundations. In other words, Honduras is not a "criminal's paradise" by accident. The conditions in Honduras are ripe to conduct illicit operations. How so? Why now and not before?

The Northern Triangle of Central America—Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—is often linked for its breakdown into criminal violence. These three countries have suffered from increased homicide rates for over the last 25 years. In the current context of criminal environment, another grouping offers a better explanation for the increase in violence in Honduras. For Honduras, the group that explains the current violent landscape includes the United States, Colombia and Mexico.

The development of the drug trade and changes in organizations and distribution has created a so called "balloon effect" that has significantly altered the Central American criminal environment, and that of Honduras in particular.⁹³ First, the partial success of the drug effort in the Upper Huallaga Valley in Peru and in Bolivia shifted production to Colombia. Cocaine was a legal small trade in forsaken corners in the Andes, becoming an

⁹² Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1988), 31.

⁹³ Bruce Bagley, "Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in the Americas Major Trends in the Twenty-First Century," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Latin American Program* (August 2012), 1.

illicit commodity in the 1950s. Pressure from the United States shifted the wholesale trade to Colombia and then to Northern Mexico.⁹⁴

The rise in Colombian cocaine in the 1970s and 1980s, and the influence of the Medellin and Cali cartels to orchestrate the trade to reach U.S. markets, began thereafter. The war in Central America facilitated narcotics trafficking throughout the region as each side in the conflict sought ways to fund its particular cause.⁹⁵ In addition, the partial success of the war on drugs in Colombia and the dismantling of large hierarchal DTOs created a void that was quickly filled by Mexican cartels in the 1990s. Colombian organized crime expanded the cocaine trade via Mexico through Cuban-born trafficker Alberto Falcon and Honduran criminal Juan Matta Ballesteros. With networks of distribution in Mexico and the United States, police protection, and plenty of willing participants, Mexicans began smuggling cocaine in 1975 (see Figure 8).⁹⁶

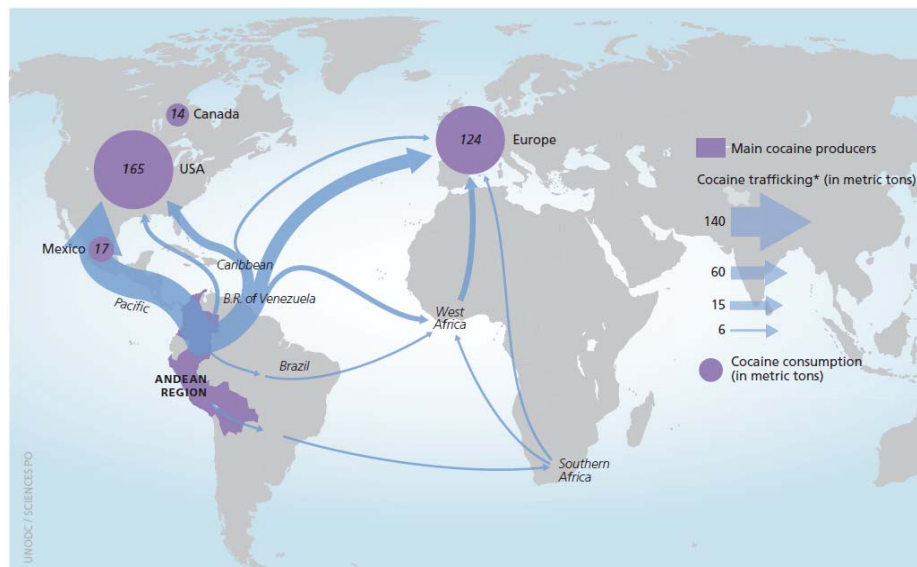


Figure 8. Major Global Cocaine Flows in 2008
(from UNODC World Drug Report, 2010).

⁹⁴ Paul Gootenberg, "Cocaine's Long March North, 1900–2010," *Latin American Politics and Society* 54, no. 1 (March 2012): 160.

⁹⁵ William L. Marcy, *The Politics of Cocaine How U.S. Policy Has Created a Thriving Drug Industry in Central and South America* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2010), 107.

⁹⁶ Luis Astorga, "Organized Crime and the Organization of Crime," in John Bailey and Roy Godson, *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 58.

The Department of Justice National Drug Intelligence Center identifies the Mexican TCOs as the number one supplier, trafficker, and wholesale distributor of illicit drugs in the United States. The Colombian, Asian, Dominican, Cuban, and Western African TCOs have a smaller share of the market. Of the Mexican TCOs, the Sinaloa cartel is the most powerful and most complex in their economic model. After the fall of the Medellin and Cali cartels and proliferation of others, the Mexican cartels have utilized their proximity to the United States to seize control of the drug trade. The Sinaloa, Zetas, Gulf, Juarez, Beltran-Leyva Organization (BLO), La Familia Michoacana (LFM), and the Tijuana cartels compete for the drug corridors.

The competition for territory and drug markets resulted in high levels of violence. The violence is concentrated in the northern cities of Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Reynosa, Tijuana, Sinaloa and Juarez. In 2009, 6,000 deaths along the Mexican side of the border were related to the fight over the control of the border. Juarez drug-related death toll reached 2,500 in 2009 and increased to 3,000 the following year and by 2011 the 5-year total surpassed 9,000.⁹⁷ Prior to San Pedro Sula claiming the title, Juarez was known as *the most violent city in the world*.

Moreover, over 70,000 deaths since 2006 are attributed to the illicit trade. It is reported that drugs generate between \$18 and \$39 billion a year in profits for the Mexican cartels. The drug business is extremely lucrative, with 20 million users a month and 2.5 million perpetual users in the United States.⁹⁸ The problem has become difficult to contain for Mexico—even with the world’s 11th-largest economy and a large capable military; it is not difficult to predict the outcome when these actors expand their operations to weaker nations in Central America.

The rise in power of these DTOs prompted the response of the Mexican government to declare their own war against these groups. Mexico’s response to the threat has been the extensive use of its military. Under President Vicente Fox, Mexico

⁹⁷ Shannon K. O’Neil, *Two Nations Indivisible Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

⁹⁸ Alberto Diaz-Cayeros and Andrew Selee, “Mexico and the United States The Possibilities of Partnership,” accessed February 25, 2014, <http://usmex.ucsd.edu/assets/001/503110.pdf>.

committed an average of 19,293 troops annually to battling drug trafficking. The figure increased to 45,000 during the Calderon administration. In 2009, the Army assigned 48,750 men to combating narcotics organizations—with approximately one-quarter involved in joint operations with the Navy, the Federal Police, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Homeland Security Department, and other agencies. The emphasis on the military produced mixed results. The National Defense Ministry (SEDENA) announced that between December 1, 2006, and late December 2011, it had arrested 41,023 suspects, while killing 2,321 criminals.⁹⁹

The increased pressure from the Mexican government created the “cockroach effect,” where these groups dispersed and began to look for other regions and countries from which to expand operations.¹⁰⁰ TCOs significantly increased drug trafficking throughout Central America, especially Honduras and Guatemala. According to the Department of State statistics, cocaine coming into the U.S. via Central America rose from 1 percent in 2007 to 95 percent in 2010.¹⁰¹

Two of these countries that Mexican TCOs expanded to are Honduras and Guatemala. In this context, the combination of the partial success of the war on drugs by the United States in the Andes, rise of the Mexican cartel and their role in taking over transportation and distribution from Colombians, and Mexican President Felipe Calderon’s pressure to curb the TCOs influence has spillover into Honduras resulting in increased violence.¹⁰²

Mexico’s Zetas and Sinaloa cartels operate in Honduras. They use the wild Mosquito Coast for drug deliveries, intensifying their influence after the 2009 Honduran coup. “We are between those who consume drugs and those who produce them. Logically we are a corridor traffic,” stated Pompeyo Bonilla Reyes, Honduras former

⁹⁹ George Grayson, “The Impact of President Felipe Calderon’s War on Drugs on the Armed Forces The Prospects for Mexico’s Militarization and Bilateral Relations,” January 2013. U.S. Army War College Press, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/>.

¹⁰⁰ Bagley, “Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in the Americas,” 3.

¹⁰¹ Inkster and Comolli, *Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States*, 98.

¹⁰² Randall C. Archibald and Damien Cave, “Drug Wars Push Deeper into Central America,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2011.

security minister under President Lobo.¹⁰³ The quantities that now passed through Central America and the amounts that these governments seize are extremely high. An estimated 200 metric tons of cocaine passed through Honduras in 2009.¹⁰⁴ In 2000, Central American countries seized less cocaine than Mexico. In 2011, they captured 12 times more than Mexico.¹⁰⁵ The seizures are both a combination of the increased in traffic and the increase assistance from the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) and Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) to capture as much as possible before it gets to Mexico where it becomes extremely difficult to interdict.

Honduras is the latest state to succumb to the blood trail that is often associated with illegal activity that generates huge profits. The profit generated from the global illicit trade threatens the security of states everywhere the criminal agents or groups operate. In 1988, the director of the International Monetary Fund, Michel Camdessus, estimated that the money laundering represented between 2 and 5 percent of the global economy. Surpassing Camdessus “beyond imagination” estimates, 2001 estimates place the figure of dirty money at up to 10 percent of global GDP.¹⁰⁶ The continued expansion of the illicit trade in size, scope, and influence—prompted the strategy for the United States government to combat the threat and build international cooperation. The American President’s 2011 Strategy to *Combat Transnational Organized Crime* defined the concept as

those self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate transnationally for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, monetary and/or commercial gains, wholly or in part by illegal means, while protecting their activities through a pattern of corruption and/ or violence, or while protecting their illegal activities through a transnational organizational structure and the exploitation of transnational commerce or communication mechanisms...¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ “The Eye of the Storm; Violence in Honduras.” *The Economist* 403, no. 8789 (Jun 16, 2012): 44.

¹⁰⁴ Dudley, “Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America,” 72.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Moises Naim, *Illicit How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 16.

¹⁰⁷ National Security Council, *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime Addressing Converging Threats to National Security* (Washington, DC: National Security Council, July 2011).

Explaining the emergence of the Honduran experience with transnational organized crime is relatively straightforward. Honduras, similarly to most states, has experienced the economic interdependence and globalization that on the one hand was seen as a stabilizing influence through the growth of licit economies has also led to the emergence and growth of drug trafficking and the illicit activity.¹⁰⁸

The global illicit trade is nothing new and has been part of the market economies since states empires agreed to trade among one another. However, the illicit trade of today is radically different than at any point in history. According to Moises Naim, economic and political shifts, as well as technological advances since the 1990s, have blurred the borders and decreased the power of governments to regulate or control what comes in or out of their territory.¹⁰⁹

Prior to the 1990s, most organized criminals operated in fixed hierarchies, with controlling leaders and rigid control measures. Since the early 1990s, these new criminals are operating in decentralized networks, multiple loosely linked cells, and continuously adapt as the market or opportunities arise.¹¹⁰ While some of the attention has focused on cartels and kingpins like Pablo Escobar and, recently, Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, they are only a footnote in a booming trade. The fact is that the illicit trade of today is bigger and beyond the capabilities of any single leader or entities. The trade is fast with a multitude of transactions, warehousing, transportation, front companies, marketing, distribution, emails, and wire transfers—impossible to control in an open global economy.¹¹¹

Further complicating matters, as the trade went global and the profits increased, so did the smugglers and traffickers political influence, leading to an increase in global crime. According to the UNODC, in 2009 TCOs generated an estimated \$870 billion or about 1.5 percent of the global gross domestic product. According to Havocscope—a

¹⁰⁸ Stanley Einstein and Menachem Amir, *Organized Crime Uncertainties and Dilemmas* (Chicago University of Illinois at Chicago, Office of International Criminal Justice, 1999), 22.

¹⁰⁹ Naim, *Illicit*, 16.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

website that tracks global black market data—money laundering is valued at \$2.5 trillion, the global black market valued was estimated at \$1.82 trillion, with organized crime valued at \$322 billion, and bribery and corruption valued at \$1.6 trillion.¹¹² More money combined with the corruption rampant in almost every governmental and political institution in the country for most of the history of Honduras has created the conditions for the severe security crises.

In the Americas, examples of the consequences of powerful TCOs have already taken place. Colombia and Peru provide insight of the combination of illicit trafficking funding armed non-state actors to conduct terrorists' acts. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- FARC), Auto Defensas de Colombia (AUC, self-defense forces of Colombia,) and in Peru with the shining path—drug money provided these groups a great source of financing for their violent criminal activity. In 2003, the Colombian government estimated that the FARC earned \$783 million in cocaine revenue alone.¹¹³

Whereas borders play a significant role for states and their sovereignty, for criminals these artificial barriers bring opportunities and provide protection from more capable states that can target them. In this context, states are at disadvantage when chasing after criminals across borders. According to Moisés Naim, the privileges and constraints of borders is making criminals difficult to capture and is causing governments everywhere to lose.¹¹⁴

The ability of transnational criminals to circumvent laws and evade authorities represents severe consequences for the security of the states in the region. These criminals are using the same infrastructure and networks that legitimate businesses and governments use for trade.

¹¹² Cited in John P. Sullivan, "Transnational Crime" in *Mary Kaldor and Iavor Rangelov, The Handbook of Global Security Policy*, 2014, 161.

¹¹³ Naim, *Illicit*, 29.

¹¹⁴ Naim, *Illicit*, 13.

Thus far, criminal networks have mostly utilized the infrastructure in the Americas for generating profit. As technology is more accessible and globalization creates opportunities, society has become more vulnerable. International networks have become more elaborate among organized crime, drug traffickers, arms dealers, and money launderers, leading to a dramatic increase in the threat they pose and the trail of blood left behind. Organized crime has incorporated Honduras as a spoke of operations, and with the possibility of becoming a hub.

1. Drug Trafficking in Honduras

Honduras has problems generated by the increased in drug trafficking. The drug trafficking and nexus to crime, however, is less certain. According to Honduran President Juan Carlos Hernandez, about 8 out of 10 murders in Honduras are related to drugs. With that in mind, the government has made fighting organized crime the top priority to reduce the homicides and violence in the country. Are drug traffickers responsible for the increase in violence? How does it manifest across the country and what has made it such a major threat as the government claims?

A month into taking office, President Juan Orlando Hernandez praised Colombian cooperation with Honduras in the security arena. Orlando Hernandez publicly acknowledged that the support that the administration of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos gave to Honduras in their pursuit of the passage of the law that would allow the military to shoot down planes that enter Honduran airspace without authorization was the type of alliances his country seeks. The praise to Colombia was also presumably a show of disdain toward the United States, which has publicly expressed its reservations about such a law. In February, William Brownfield—Assistant Secretary, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs responsible for the State Department programs to combat illicit drugs and organized crime¹¹⁵—stated

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/154184.htm>.

his concerns during an interview to a Honduran television station that the possibility of shooting down an innocent plane may hurt the long-term fight against drug trafficking.¹¹⁶

The concern of aerial trafficking expands over three decades. Over the years, with accumulated experience and increased success and profits, the frequency and amount has also increased. Flights from Venezuela make up the majority of illicit flight to Honduras and typical shipments of 200–300 kilos have nearly double that amount. In 2009, a Russian Antonov 14 cargo plane from Venezuela was believed to have carried 3.7 tons of cocaine into the country.¹¹⁷ Hundreds of unidentified planes were crossing Honduras airspace, some carrying as much as 100 tons of cocaine. The practice is so profitable that smugglers often purposely crash the planes or set them on fire.¹¹⁸

The legislature passed the decree in March shortly after Israeli radars purchased in 2013 began to arrive in Honduras. Prior to the new radars, Honduras relied mostly on the support of the United States to monitor its territory.¹¹⁹ Assistance often comes from U.S. planes operating from the Joint Task Force Bravo (JTF-B) at Soto Cano airbase, located 45 minutes from Tegucigalpa and radars near Trujillo.¹²⁰

Honduran drug trafficking resembles the challenges of other bridge states. Most of the narco planes use Honduras to drop off the illicit product and as a refueling point. When the cargo is dropped off, the product is handled by different traffickers and transportistas in Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico and to the ultimate destination in the United States (see Figure 9). The cargo is mostly transported by boats and ground transport. When the practice of in-kind payments was instituted by Colombian and Mexican traffickers, it created a domestic market in Honduras that previously did not exist. Gang members in the 1970s and 1980s used to get drunk and get high on glue,

¹¹⁶ “Frente a Frente,” Honduras, accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvbdkwcCH9E>.

¹¹⁷ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 300.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ “Honduras Compra Radares a Israel por 30 Millones de Dolares,” *La Prensa* 18 de Diciembre 2013, <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/tegucigalpa/435123-98/honduras-compra-radares-a-israel-por-30-millones-de-dolares>.

¹²⁰ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 300.

better known for its brand name “Resistol.” Today, cocaine and marijuana are the stimulants of choice.

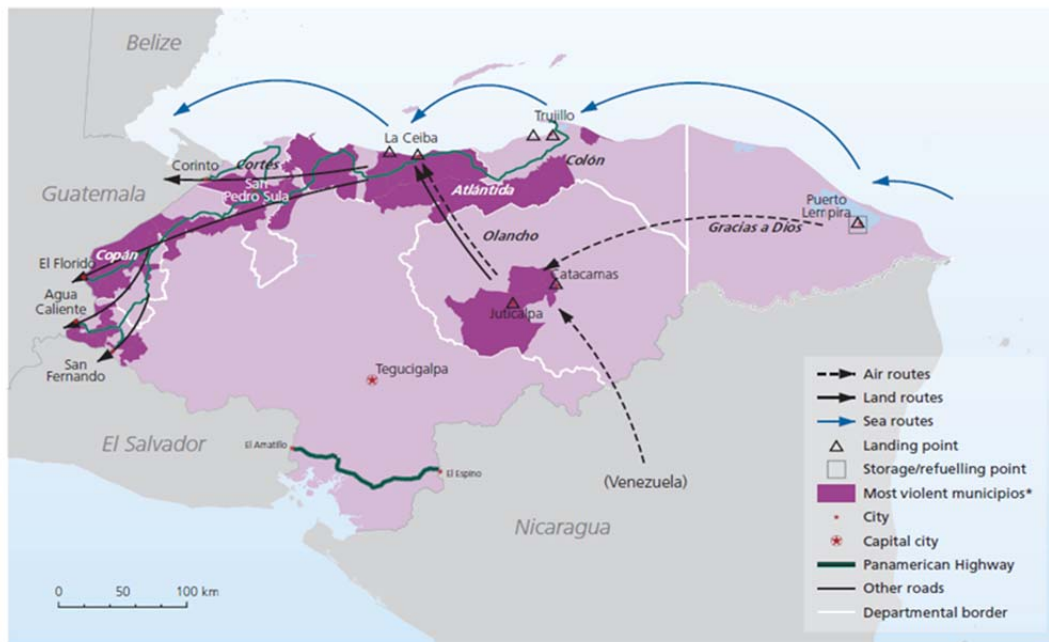


Figure 9. Honduras Drug Trafficking Routes (from UNODC, 2012).

Honduran narco entrepreneurs lacking the logistical capacity and network to transport the product to the United States began to market the product to Honduran buyers in the largest cities. That made criminal gangs major players in the illicit trade. To get the funds, gangs began to commit robberies, extortions, home invasions, and carjackings to raise the money to purchase the drugs and guns. Once the money was raised, new customers were attracted by the offering of free samples; once these customers were hooked, they went back to the dealer who now had a customer base to sell to. For the customers who could not afford it, they began to steal from their homes, once that did not suffice petty thefts and robberies became commonplace. As the business has grown, gangs—which are characterized by their territorial nature—began fighting one another for control of the market and indiscriminate violence became the norm. While an estimated 80 percent of the drugs that reach the United States travel through Honduras, an increasing amount is staying in country.

In addition to more illicit drugs staying in country, there is also worrisome evidence that Honduras may also become a producer and processor. On January 31, 2014, the police found evidence of homegrown opium and marijuana. In a hard to reach area 400 kilometers from Tegucigalpa, in the hamlet of La Cumbre, municipality of Iguala, the police discovered an area measuring 100 meters long by 40 meters wide, with 1,800 opium poppy plants and 800 marijuana plants.¹²¹ Previously, the only place in Central America where opium poppies had been found was in El Petén, Guatemala. Opium paste is the raw material for making heroin, a highly addictive drug for which demand has increased.¹²²

2. Maras

The study on Honduran violence is not extensive, and the study of maras is even less so. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, maras were labeled enemy number one by the state. Articles highlighted that maras constitute a sort of a new counterinsurgency in Central America, stating that they pose a threat to the country they inhabit and, because of their connections in the United States, are groups that TCOs and terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda could seek to form an alliance with.¹²³ The hysteria of gangs was only outdone by the lack of research in the proliferation of gangs in Honduras and their nexus to crime.

Thomas Bruneau has published one of the few books on maras and their nexus to public security in Central America. Bruneau found during his research that there was limited material on the subject. The major research generated was by Jose Miguel Cruz, Dennis Rodgers, and Sonja Wolf.¹²⁴ Additionally, there have been micro-level qualitative studies done by Ailsa Winton in Guatemala, Mo Hume in El Salvador, and Rodgers in

¹²¹ Thelma Mejia, "Honduras Drug Trade Takes a Turn for the Worse." *Global Information Network*, Mar 15, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1508155150?accountid=12702>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Washington Times. 2004. "Al Qaeda Seeks Tie to Local Gangs." September 28 www.washingtontimes.com.

¹²⁴ Bruneau, *Maras Gang Violence and Security in Central America*.

Nicaragua.¹²⁵ Ethnographic research has been almost non-existent due to the inherent risks that it brings researchers. One of the promising films and research was by filmmaker Christian Poveda, but his 2008 documentary *La Vida Loca*¹²⁶ portraying the way of life of a clique of Calle Dieciocho in El Salvador, was cut short when the members of the gang shot and killed him.¹²⁷ According to the Salvadoran police, Poveda was shot because the clique suspected he was passing information to them.¹²⁸

The lack of research on gangs has led to variation in statistics and analysis to the extent of the gang problem. Notwithstanding the difficulty in gathering quantitative data, several estimates have placed the numbers at 50,000 in 2003, 24,000 in 2008 and 12,000 in 2012 (see Figure 10).¹²⁹ Some estimates placed the numbers of gang members as low as 4,728.¹³⁰ The fact is that there is no accurate data on how many gang members are in Honduras, and most of the figures are to be questioned. In retrospect, some of the headlines noting that as many as 70,000 sympathizers could also decide to join just helped blur the extent of the problem.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Sonja Wolf, "Mara Salvatrucha The Most Dangerous Street Gang in the Americas?" *Latin American Politics and Society* 54, no. 1 (March 2012): 69.

¹²⁶ Cristian Poveda, "*La Vida Loca*," accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8MMrUpzZYE>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ La Prensa Grafica, "Un policia Capturado en Caso Poveda y Cuatro Personas Mas," accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGHgnAITkFA>.

¹²⁹ Bunc and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 308; Bruneau, *Maras Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, 12; and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "2012 Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean A Threat Assessment" (September 2012), 29.

¹³⁰ RESDAL, "Public Security Index in Central America," 88.

¹³¹ Pine, *Working Hard, Drinking Hard*, 32.

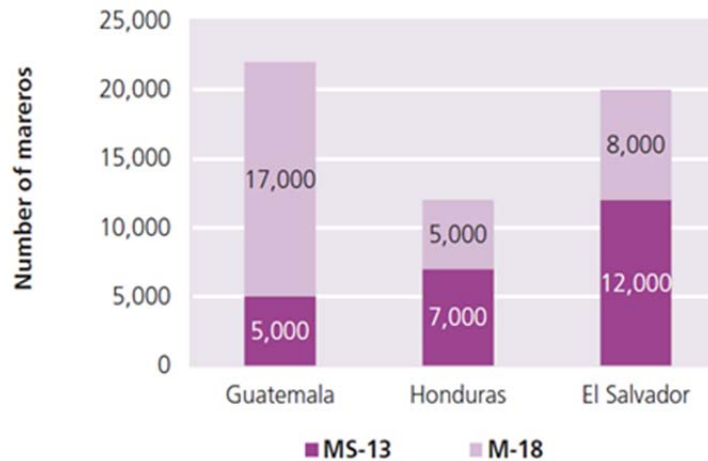


Figure 10. Estimates of Mareros in the Northern Triangle, 2012
(from UNODC Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean, September 2012).

Part of the problem is that the police, military, NGOs, and the Honduran society have yet to get a full appreciation of the complexity of gang membership and formation. Citizens see a one-sided view of mareros and the other is told to them by corrupt and untrained police. The Church and other agencies working in Honduras further cloud the understanding by linking gangs to societal problems that on the one hand sometimes do explain some cases of youth joining gangs, but that in the majority of cases do not. Further complicating matters are international observers' outrageous claims that linked gangs to the new type of insurgency that may challenge the state authorities through "coups d' street."¹³²

Religion plays a major role in Honduras. In addition to the increase in violence in the last 15 years, there has also been an increase in evangelical Christian movements, especially the prominence of evangelicalism.¹³³ The mara culture invokes both devilish type admiration combined with religious symbolism. Tattoos of maras will often display both the allegiance to the gang and to God. For the mareros that want to leave the gang

¹³² Max G Manwaring, *A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty Gangs and Other Illicit Transnational Criminal Organizations in Central America, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica, and Brazil* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007), viii.

¹³³ J. Wolseth, "Safety and Sanctuary Pentecostalism and Youth Gang Violence in Honduras," *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 4 (July 1, 2008): 98.

lifestyle, becoming a devout Christian is one of the few alternatives recognized by the gang. The religious congregations and the population that are considered cristianos are not victimized relative to the remainder of the population that is not devout Christians. In this vein, religion is a major factor bridging maras and society. In Honduras, most people believe that ultimately it is God who decides their fate. There are many dangerous and impoverished aldeas and colonias, too many for a country that believes in the power of destiny. Yet, when there are no institutions of social control, belief in a higher power provides a sense of security against the chaos rampant in Honduras.

One of the major actors that assisted with brokering the gang truce in El Salvador was the Church. The Honduran religious leaders have also attempted to become mediators in similar agreements between the state, mareros and society. Despite the lack of success with reducing violence, religious groups are likely to continue to play a major role as long as religion maintains the same significance in maras. The complexity of between violence, gang life, and religion were vividly presented in the film *La Vida Loca*.

The nexus of urbanization, an unusually large percentage of youth population, the decay of the typical nuclear family, and the economy have been largely utilized as causal reasons why young men and some women join maras. Urban density has been promoted as a major reason narco-trafficking and crime has grown because fewer resources and more people in a smaller space supposedly create conflict.¹³⁴ However, these reasons must be extensively assessed in the Honduras case and must not be applied as freely as it has been thus far. The violence in Honduras goes beyond the simple explanations of urbanization and poor youth lacking any options but to join gangs.

Also important, yet not discussed in Honduras, are studies that contradict reasons that drive young people to gangs. A 2001 survey of 1,000 gang members by the Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica (IUDOP) found that 40 percent claimed to have joined the gang to “hang out,” 21 percent because of friends already in the gang, and 21 percent

¹³⁴ Wolseth, “Safety and Sanctuary Pentecostalism and Youth Gang Violence,” 375.

to get away from family problems.¹³⁵ Employment appeared as a positive correlation, 17 percent responded that they were employed, in contrast to 66 percent that responded unemployed.¹³⁶

There are also problems with the job theory relating to gangs and crime. The theory states that “The job, with its regular hours, its restrictions, and its compensation, settles the adolescent down and satisfies his previously unsatisfied wants.”¹³⁷ The assumption that those with jobs are less likely to commit crime than those without jobs is incorrect. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi, people attached to jobs “are *more* rather than less likely to be delinquent.”¹³⁸ When they tested their theory in control groups, assigning jobs to some and withholding jobs from others, Hirschi and Gottfredson found “differences in rates of crime are small, non-existent, or even in the wrong direction.”¹³⁹

Furthermore, mareros who want to hang out or be with their maras do not necessarily want to work. That is the total opposite reason for joining gangs. In this context, it can be expected that gang members’ rates of unemployment will be higher because most do not want to have a traditional job that pays them a small wage working in the fields or maquilas.

In Honduras, the vast majority of mareros are male between the ages of 12 and 30.¹⁴⁰ The median age for males in Honduras is 21.6¹⁴¹ years old and 54 percent of the population is between 10 and 29 years of age.¹⁴² With an estimated 8.5 million population, conservative estimates would place nearly a quarter of the population in the “at risk” category. According to human rights activists, young men between 12 and

¹³⁵ Ibid., 378.

¹³⁶ Maria Giralt Santacruz, and Alberto Concha-Eastman, *Barrio adentro La solidaridad violenta de las pandillas* [Inside the Barrio The Violent Solidarity of Gangs]. San Salvador Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública, 2001 (IUDOP), cited in O. Jutersonke, “Gangs, Urban Violence, and Security,” 378.

¹³⁷ Gottfredson and Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime*, 138.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Gottfredson and Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime*, 139.

¹⁴⁰ O. Jutersonke, “Gangs, Urban Violence, and Security,” 378.

¹⁴¹ CIA WorldFactbook accessed March 12, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ho.html>.

¹⁴² Gutierrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence*, 64.

24 accounted for nearly 73 percent of the violent deaths recorded in Honduras in 2001.¹⁴³ Further, according to the UNODC, in Honduras 1 in 360 males aged 15–29 falls victim to intentional homicide every year, compared to 1 in 280 males in the 30–44 age group (see Figure 11).¹⁴⁴

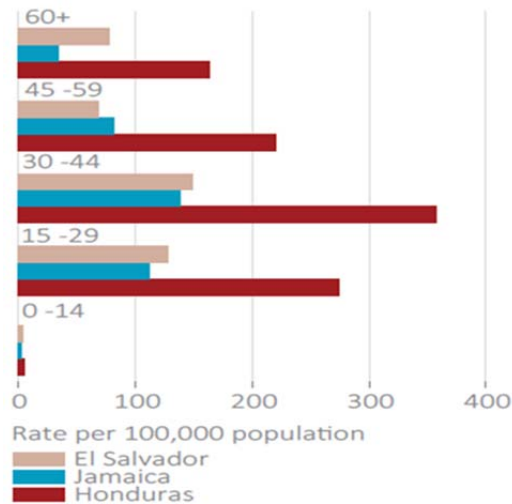


Figure 11. Male Homicide Rate, by Age Group, Honduras, El Salvador, and Jamaica, 2012 (UNODC, 2014).

In addition, today’s data of victims of intentional homicides, age group rates of arrested has also has been proven invariant across societies and culture.¹⁴⁵ Studies have shown no variance in the age distribution of crime from England and Wales 1842–44, England in 1908 and the United States in 1979. Recent data has prompted the conclusion that despite the total number of arrests increasing, age followed in the same pattern, with 15- to 17-year-olds constituting the highest arrest rates per population of any age group.¹⁴⁶

When thinking about the huge numbers, the absurdity of the claims becomes evident. Nevertheless, that did not stop presidential administrations from declaring war

¹⁴³ Wolseth, “Safety and Sanctuary: Pentecostalism and Youth Gang Violence,” 98.

¹⁴⁴ UNODC, *2013 Global Study on Homicide*, 30.

¹⁴⁵ Gottfreson and Hirschi, *General Theory of Crime*, 128.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

on maras and in the process to a degree also declaring war against poor young males. In 2010, 36.6 percent of Honduras lived in poverty, of those 20.1 percent lived in extreme poverty (see Table 3)¹⁴⁷

	Poverty %	Extreme Poverty %	Unemployment %
Honduras (2010)	36.6	20.1	6.0 (2013)
Guatemala (2006)	25.5	11.3	
El Salvador (2012)	16.7	3.9	6.2

Table 3. Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador: Poverty, Extreme Poverty and Unemployment, Latest Year (from ECLAC, 2014).¹⁴⁸

The government under the administration of Ricardo Maduro sided with the rhetoric that maras were actors responsible for the insecurity in the country. Mano dura policies followed, and initial declines in homicides in 2004 generated short-term legitimacy to what we know today were bad policies. The nexus between crime and gangs was highly exaggerated, partly because there were multiple criminal actors participating in the violence landscape. As it turns out, mara members were the easiest to target because of their territorial nature and over the top tattoos and distinctive clothing. Unsurprisingly, many mareros began to hide in the countryside and spreading gang doctrine in different areas of Honduras.

Mandatory sentencing and pressure on prosecutors and judges to get mareros off the street resulted in increased prison population. The prosecution of mareros was highly questionable, often the evidence was recycle from one case to another utilizing one witness testimony for several cases. Authorities had to come with creative ways, after all in Honduras witness do not come forward. As a result, the prison population nearly doubled from 6,200 in 1994 to 11,200 in 2004.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013* (Santiago, Chile: United Nations publication, 2013), 76.

¹⁴⁸ ECLAC, *2013 Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean*, 56–76.

¹⁴⁹ Gutierrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence*, 121.

None of the Northern-tier countries had success with their versions of heavy-handed policies. With international and domestic pressure, all three countries have been forced to find alternate ways to deal with youth violence.¹⁵⁰ Thus far, Honduras struggles to implement strategies that are not some sort of an authoritarian type response.

B. A WEAK AND FRAGILE STATE

Max Weber defined the state as “a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”¹⁵¹ Using Weber’s definition as a baseline, Lothar Brock highlights the government, the economy and nationhood as major areas of deficiencies characteristic of fragile states.¹⁵² Depending on the weakness in each of these areas—determines how much violence, poverty, and national identity exists. In 2009, the Fund for Peace Failed States Index listed 131 of 177 states in critical, in danger, or near state failure.¹⁵³ The Failed State Index ranks Honduras 75th out of 178 countries.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, the Brookings Institute utilizing 20 indicators of state weakness placed Honduras 69th out of 141.¹⁵⁵ While Honduras is not in the levels of Rwanda, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or even Haiti, the Honduran security crisis is alarming. These rankings also show that while public security is a major concern, the state is not at risk of collapsing or becoming a failed state. With all the problems and shortcomings in Honduras, the situation there is better than in almost half of the world’s states.

Strong societies are extremely important to make a strong state stronger and a weak state stable. A strong state requires a strong society for longevity, whereas a weak state can survive as long as it has a strong society, however a weak state and a weak

¹⁵⁰ Bruneau, *Maras Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, 16.

¹⁵¹ Lothar Brock et al., “Fragile States and Violence: The Limits of External Assistance,” *Global Dialogue* 13, No 1, (Winter/Spring, 2011): 48.

¹⁵² Brock, “Fragile States,” 46.

¹⁵³ Kenneth J. Menkhaus, “State Fragility as a Wicked Problem,” Center for Complex Operations National Defense University 1, no. 2 (March 2010): 87.

¹⁵⁴ Fund for Peace, “The Failed State Index 2011,” accessed January 12, 2014, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=cfsir1210>.

¹⁵⁵ The Brookings Institute, Index of State Weakness In the Developing World,” accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2008/02/weak-states-index>.

society pose the greatest problem internally and regionally. In Central America, Costa Rica is an example of a strong state with a strong society, in Honduras on the other hand, both the state and society are weak. The end result is one state that has the highest homicide rate in the world, whereas Costa Rica is a model for democracy and security in an area dominated by weak states and weak societies.

For nearly 15 years, from the mid-1990s through 2010, the United States' national security narrative emphasized the dangers posed by fragile states.¹⁵⁶ The Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy argued that threat to the United States had shifted from conquering states to failing ones.¹⁵⁷ The conceptual framework of the consequences of fragile states has relied on the belief that these territories are fertile grounds for terrorism, violence, regional instability, disease outbreak, and environmental hazards.¹⁵⁸ The first assessment on the fragility of the state is the internal threat posed by the state toward the population and the inability of the state to protect them.

The "spillover" effect is one of the main concerns for regional security that directly affects Honduras. International economic and political factors also shaped how the developed nations view state fragility. The failure of neoliberal reforms and weak structural and institutional capacity has adversely impacted the Third World. Public security is a major issue affecting the weak states in these regions. The current landscape of increasing social and criminal violence cannot be divorced from the political history and modes of transition to democracy. Africa and Latin America rank first and second, respectively, in the number of homicides per capita. Figures from the United Nations' 2011 global study of homicides reported the homicide rate in Africa and the Americas (at 17 and 16 per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively) is more than double the global average (6.9 per 100,000). The homicide figures for Asia, Europe, and Oceania (between 3 and 4 per 100,000) are roughly half.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Mazaar, "Rise and Fall," 133.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 114.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 113.

¹⁵⁹ UNODC, *2011 Global Study on Homicide*, 9.

The solution for a weak and fragile state lies in the ability of the political leaders of the fragile state to implement reforms and have the resources available to sustain them. Both of these reforms have been absent in Honduras. In countries like Honduras, Kenneth J. Menkhaus accurately describes the fragile state paradigm as a “wicked” problem. State fragility is a wicked problem, he argues, because it is not solvable due to the leaders’ unwillingness, capability, and the state’s capacity.¹⁶⁰

1. Political Corruption in Honduras

Political corruption is widespread in Honduras. The two center-right parties have ruled the country for most of the 20th century and since the end of military rule. In addition to their similar ideology, “the objective of political competition between the two parties has not been a competition for policies or programs, but rather a competition for personal gain in which the public sector is turned into private benefit.”¹⁶¹

The corruption is so evident and widespread that all the political leaders, institutions and citizens call for reforms. Hondurans have “little or no confidence in almost every governmental and political institution in the country, with political parties among the least trusted.”¹⁶² The call for action is puzzling. If the leaders and institutions are calling for action, then it begs the question: who is corrupt? The issue of corruption was a major issue during the last campaign. For the first time in nearly a century, the hegemony of the two major political parties was challenged. Six months prior to the presidential election, polls had Xiomara Castro, of Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE) in the lead with 28 percent. She was followed by television personality Salvador Nasralla, founder and candidate of the Partido Anti-Corrupcion (PAC) with 21 percent, Juan Orlando Hernández of the PN 18 percent, and Mauricio Villeda of the PL fourth with 14 percent.

¹⁶⁰ Menkhaus, “State Fragility as a Wicked Problem,” 97.

¹⁶¹ *Honduras: A Country Study*, ed. Tim L. Merrill, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 1995), 174. Quoted in Peter J. Meyer, *Honduras-U.S. Relations*, (CRS Report for Congress July 24, 2013), 2.

¹⁶² Peter J. Meyer, *Honduras-U.S. Relations* (CRS Report for Congress July 24, 2013), 7.

Juan Orlando Hernandez eventually won the election with 36.89 percent, followed by Xiomara Castro with 28.78 percent, Mauricio Villeda with 20.30 percent, and in fourth place Salvador Nasralla with 13.43 percent of the popular vote.¹⁶³ Despite not winning the elections, Castro, the wife of ousted President Manuel Zelaya, and Nasralla, a political outsider, proved that the two-party system in Honduras is on shaky ground at best and with the possibility of more changes at the horizon given the rampant corruption and security failure largely attributed to the two dominant parties.

Corruption is not only reserved for politicians. The drug trade has increased the scale and extent of corruption and criminal activity throughout all economic classes. Participating in the drug trade is not only appealing to nearly 80 percent of the population that compete for 40 percent of the distribution of income, but also for the richest 20 percent that account for 60.2 percent of the country's income distribution.¹⁶⁴ Over the years, Honduran elites have sought to gain from the drug trade through their influences and positions in society.¹⁶⁵ Although not nearly at the level of other Central American countries, money laundering has grown exponentially. In 2010, The Honduran National Police (PNC) in a joint operation with the DEA seized \$7,547,000 at the International airport in San Pedro Sula.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, Los Cachiros and Handal Perez DTOs have laundered millions of dollars in mainstream business, banking, and real estate (see Appendices A and B). Similar to other TCOs, Honduran traffickers are having a hard time figuring out what to do with so much money.

According to Bunck and Fowler, the corruption in the Honduran criminal justice system is “truly spectacular in its depth and extent.”¹⁶⁷ In 2000, the DOS observed that “the judicial system is under severe strain due to corrupt, inefficient and overworked judges and lack training and equipment.”¹⁶⁸ There are two types of corruption—grand

¹⁶³ Tribunal Supremo Electoral de Honduras, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://siede.tse.hn/escrutinio/index.php>.

¹⁶⁴ ECLAC, *2013 Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean*, 78.

¹⁶⁵ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 258.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 262.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 258.

corruption done by senior officials, and petty corruption, done by lower-level functionaries.¹⁶⁹ Political corruption is defined as “the abuse of public office for private gain.”¹⁷⁰ Common abuses of elected or appointed officials include embezzlement, bribery, peddling and nepotism. Grand corruption involves senior political and government officials usually in the form of large sums of money, whereas petty corruption involves lesser amounts of money and lower-level state officials.¹⁷¹

Transparency International, an anticorruption NGO, created in 1995 a corruption perception that merges different surveys conducted by independent institutions. In 2008, out of the 180 countries studied, Transparency International ranked Honduras 126 and Nicaragua 134, the bottom two in Central America. Moreover, on their scale most corrupt and least corrupt (1.0 and 10, respectively), Honduras’s score was 2.6. In contrast, Costa Rica fared the best in the region, with a ranking of 47 and a score of 5.1.¹⁷² Overall, Honduras ranks in the bottom third of all countries studied, trailing only Paraguay, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Haiti as countries in the Americas suffering from rampant corruption.¹⁷³

In the World Bank Control of Corruption Indicator, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua placed near the bottom 25th percentile of the 208 nations covered. Latinobarómetro corruption surveys, provide public opinion surveys of citizens’ opinions and experiences with corruption. In 2008, Latinobarómetro asked, “Imagine there are 100 public employees in the country and you have to say how many you believe are corrupt. How many would you say are corrupt?” Honduran citizens’ responses were the most negative, with the opinion that 80.6 out of 100 were corrupt. There are variations in the studies of corruption, for instance LAPOP Americas Barometer, found Panama number one (least) and Costa Rica fifth in Central America in term of percentage of

¹⁶⁹ J. Mark Ruhl, “Political Corruption in Central America Assessment and Explanation” *Latin American Politics and Society* 53, No.1 (2011): 33.

¹⁷⁰ World Bank, “Helping Countries Combat Corruption: The Role of the World Bank” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1997), 8.

¹⁷¹ Ruhl, “Political Corruption,” 35.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

respondents victimized by corruption and percentage of citizens that were asked for a bribe by a public employee.¹⁷⁴ Combined, however, the consensus is that Costa Rica is the least corrupt and Honduras and Nicaragua the most corrupt. Both countries suffer from rampant high-level corruption and middle-range petty corruption.¹⁷⁵ Ruhl argues that progress can be made by targeting petty corruption first because it touches more people and through the reduction of red tape in bureaucratic low-level processes are a relative easier fix vis-a-vis grand corruption which is more complex.¹⁷⁶

An important aspect of corruption also involves weak judiciary, where the cost of corruption is small; the rates for grand corruption are higher. Not surprisingly, Honduras's weak judiciary is a major contributor to both grand and petty corruption. When asked in regard to the Honduran judicial corruption, a foreign official expert in antidrug matters stated, "I can't imagine it's any worse anywhere else in Central America. Here it's blatant bribery. Put the money on the table and adios. It extends all the way through the judicial system and right up to the Supreme Court."¹⁷⁷

To address the problem, Honduras created the National Anticorruption Council and Central American countries signed the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (IACAC), the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), and the Guatemala Declaration for a Region Free of Corruption, and also have passed anticorruption laws advocated by foreign aid donors. The preliminary assessment is that these councils, although well intentioned, do not fix the widespread corruption because little has been done to strengthen the judicial systems in charge of prosecution. Ruhl concludes that Latin America's most corrupt nations will take time to transform due to the weak law enforcement institutions and the limited financial resources.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Ruhl, "Political Corruption," 43.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷⁷ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 262.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 54.

2. Institutional Capacity

“Institutions, institutions, institutions,” Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson argue, is the most common reason why nations fail today.¹⁷⁹ States that have political institutions that support extractive economic institutions cement the power of those that benefit from the extraction and take away the incentives for people to innovate, and invest, retarding the growth of institutions capable to withstand corruption. In Honduras, the nation’s politics have been dominated by elites and the military. In 2009, these two groups allied to remove President Jose Manuel Zelaya when he attempted to convene a referendum to authorize a constituent assembly that would enable him to run for a second term. The coup was in part generated from within his party, and after his removal President of the Congress Roberto Micheletti, and of the same party, took over as President.

Neoliberal economic reforms calls for the privatization of previously state owned industries as well as reducing the size of the state in part by reducing the budget. Despite not getting affected by overall national defense budget cuts, Honduras armed forces were severely affected in their off-budget ventures that made up a large percentage of their funds. The neoliberal reforms and democratization forced them to sell their services to third parties. Prior to liberalization and democratization, the military were involved in off-budget entrepreneur ventures. Honduras military has relied heavily on illegal activities to augment the funds it received from the national budget. Through democratization demands for transparency, such activities became constrained. The Roberto Reina government cut 10 percent of the budget at the same time the United States dropped the military assistance to \$500,000.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, the military lost control of the profitable state telecommunications agency (HONDUTEL), the Department of Immigration and the Merchant Marine. The military had used

¹⁷⁹ Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2012), 369.

¹⁸⁰ Rosenberg, Mark B. “Narcos and Politicos: The Politics of Drug Trafficking in Honduras,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 30, no. 2/3, Special Issue Assessing the Americas’ War on Drugs (Summer–Autumn, 1988): 143–165.

HONDUTEL and the other institutions to make up for budget cuts and as sources of illicit income.

The national police are rightly accused of ineptitude, corruption and taking part in crimes against the population. The fact that the police are so weak in Honduras is a direct result of the elites and the armed forces. The Honduran police did not exist as an institution prior to 1998. It was not until 1998 that the Honduran Congress created the PNC, under the command of the Ministry of Security responsible for law enforcement. The military lost further ground in 1999 when a constitutional reform abolished the position of chief of the armed forces and subordinated the military to a civilian defense minister.¹⁸¹

The new changes in responsibility for the police and military came at a time when the country began to face critical economic and security challenges. Hurricane Mitch devastated the country in 1998, affecting two-thirds of the population displacing hundreds of thousands and destroying the banana, shrimp, coffee, pineapple and African palm plantations. The situation motivated a flight of Hondurans migrating to the United States and created a large population in dire needs.

By the year 2000, the homicide rate in Honduras climbed to 50 homicides per 100,000 people and, to further complicate matters, it was estimated that the membership in the maras reached 36,000, and increased to an estimated 50,000 by 2003.¹⁸²

The PNC, which has the least amount of officers per citizen in Central America, was overwhelmed. Untrained, underfunded and with the military and the elites trying to control the institution, unsurprisingly the institution never build a solid foundation. Today, these problems are unresolved, with the latest recommendations to purge the police and begin anew. As discussed in the previous chapter, the military once again has been asked to intervene in the security of the country.

In 2011, the Internal Affairs Directorate had 145 ongoing investigations of police officers regarding criminal complaints, abuse of authority, robbery, police brutality, and

¹⁸¹ Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 255.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 260.

homicide. The directorate began legal proceedings in 43 of the cases, but was dismantled before the investigations were completed.¹⁸³

Until recently, the police was also in charge for the administration of Honduras prisons. Prisons are now under the authority of the National Directorate of Special Preventive Services (Dirección Nacional de Servicios Preventivos—DNSEP) also under the Minister of Security. The 24 prisons house 12,500 inmates, exceeding the 8,280 capacity.¹⁸⁴

None of the institutions, which have also included assistance from the military, have been able to curtail the influence generated by criminals inside prisons. Authorities have estimated that nearly 90 percent of extortions, kidnappings, and large percentage of contract killings are ordered from inside prison walls. Many of the orders were done with cell phones. Authorities cited an example where a *marero* allegedly order 100 killings from his cell-phone inside prison walls.¹⁸⁵

The prisons are grounds for contention for the authorities and inmates. The conditions are deplorable, which is to be expected with the state spending less than a dollar a day on each inmate. Much of the daily food consists of rice, beans and tortillas. Additionally, in the last ten years there have been three prison fires, killing over 600 prisoners. The last one occurred in February 2012, when a fire killed over 350 inmates, and half of those killed reportedly had not been convicted.¹⁸⁶

C. CONCLUSION

In sum, this chapter has shown that the major factors affecting violence in Honduras are related to transnational organized crime and the inability of the Honduran state to provide security to the populace. The shifts in the global illicit market, cocaine in

¹⁸³ Department of State, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 Honduras,” Accessed 10 March 2014, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186734.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ “Honduras Executive Summary,” Insight Crime, Organized Crime in the America’s, accessed 12 January 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/organized-crime-profile/honduras>.

¹⁸⁵ *La Prensa*, “Juan Orlando Marero ordenó 100 crímenes desde presidio,” accessed 14 February, 2014, <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/apertura/466756-98/juan-orlando-marero-ordeno-100-crimenes-desde-presidio>.

¹⁸⁶ “Honduras Executive Summary,” Insight Crime, Organized Crime in the Americas.

particular, worsen the criminal environment in Honduras. Had cocaine not entered the picture, Honduras will still be a violent country, however the levels and manner in which criminal gangs have proliferated most of the institutions would differ. Drug trafficking has been the gas that increased the fire and today it keeps it going.

Transnational organized crime has changed the way business is conducted in Honduras. Corruption has always been part of Hondurans life, but today the ability to bribe authorities is not exclusive to the country's elite. Even for poor Hondurans, corruption does not pay off in terms of personal benefit or security like it did prior to the crime wave that began in the 90s. TCOs have the ability to both fight state authorities and bribe them.

The weakness of the Honduran state, particularly its institutions in charge of law and order, are the faulty foundation that everything that is has been built on has failed. The results are some of the most ineffective, corrupt, and incapable institutions in the Americas. Moreover, the long-term effects have created a weak society that is unable to balance the weakness of the state and stand up against the criminal elements that have spread throughout the country.

Other factors such as maras, economic, youth population, lack of education, teenage pregnancy, culture, and geography have been studied and dismissed as critical to the explanation of crime. These factors are detrimental to the development of the state, and they are in part a result of defects in long-term development policies. They are not however, the reason Honduras violence levels are the highest in the world.

The state's inability to provide security to the general population and the dirty money has further complicated matters. With the dilemma of the militarization of security and the option of status quo with corrupt police and criminal justice system, what are the alternatives to PMOP and TIGRES? Honduran citizens prefer the militarization of Honduras. This is not only true for Honduras but for most of Latin America as well. Several Western democracies have experience the rise of crime rates and with it a growing sense of insecurity that has garnered populist support for increase punishment

even if it means giving up the protection of civil liberties in the effort to reduce criminality.¹⁸⁷

That is what they know to work. When analyzing the events that take place and the power of criminals in Honduras it becomes evident that the options are limited. These forces will be better than the police, but the short term must also incorporate transformation of civilian institutions.

Mas trabajo y menos violencia. More jobs and less violence is a common demand in Honduras. Families have barricaded themselves in their homes through a hardening of security. The sector of the population that can afford it hires private security that as a whole outnumbers the country's security forces. Working class residents also combine resources to pay for security. At the very minimum families put up barbed wire on top of the tall cinder block fence throughout their homes. Large businesses have armed men with shotguns throughout their premises. Even small businesses have adapted the practice of hiring their own armed security. Most of the security guards are not trained; it becomes evident that it is a deterrent for criminals to move on to easier targets and to give the customer a false sense of security.

Most Hondurans leave for their homes everyday with the realization that they are likely to get robbed, witness a crime, pursue, or in the most severe cases have a relative or an acquaintance that ends up dead. Worse than the statistics, is the constant fear that citizens live with each and every day. The most simple and mundane of activities need coordination and planning. Things like driving at night have become so dangerous that only the brave souls do it. In addition to the dangers posed by criminals, is also the poor infrastructure and failure to follow laws by the majority of the population. In 2012, 1,243 deaths happened as a result of traffic accidents.¹⁸⁸ The culture of not adhering to the rule of law has worsened over the years, further exacerbated with the lack of trust in the political institutions.

¹⁸⁷ Susanne Karstedt and Gary D. LaFree, "Democracy, Crime, and Justice," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 605 (May 2006): 8.

¹⁸⁸ RESDAL, "Public Security Index in Central America," 88.

Prosperity also has its costs. Many small businesses are extorted, and many chose to pay rather than face the alternative. There is no police that can save a citizen when criminal groups have set their target set on them. Citizens young and old, poor and rich are imprisoned in their homes, extorted in their business, endangered in the streets. The spaces for peace and security are very few and far in between.

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IV. IS HONDURAS SIMPLY EXPERIENCING A CRIME WAVE?

One of the major limitations of studying violence in Honduras is that there is no longitudinal study to provide context. This is problem not only for Honduras but for most of Latin America as well. In Central America, the comparative studies have focused on comparing each country's development and the history of internal conflicts. The end result, while instructive, leaves more questions. For instance, El Salvador has some of most trusted and more capable institutions relative to Guatemala,¹⁸⁹ yet it has had more violence and crime. Honduras, which did not have repressive civilian or military regimes relative to Nicaragua, has had more violence over the last 20 years.

Given the lack of cross-national consistency of institutions and democracy in the region, an important question to ask is whether this is just a new crime wave in Honduras. That as society, criminal actors and the state learn to cohabitate, the crime levels will decrease. Perhaps the new crime wave is Honduras's civil war, and therefore must be judged accordingly. The difficulty lies in the determining the staying power of the criminal element and the influx of drug trafficking and growth of dirty money inside the country.

An instructive comparison would be with a nation for which longitudinal research has been undertaken. David LaFree's longitudinal research of U.S. violent crime rates contends that the "understanding of crime trends is hampered by a lack of longitudinal analysis and by ahistorical approaches."¹⁹⁰ The Honduran understanding of crime is hampered by the lack of reliable data; it has not been until recently that information has been systematically collected. In the United States, there are two main data sources: the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), collected annually since 1930 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), collected every six

¹⁸⁹ Berthea G. Hampton-Gaines, "State Capacity and Effectiveness in Combating Crime A Comparative Study of El Salvador and Guatemala" (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2012).

¹⁹⁰ Gary LaFree, "Declining Violent Crime Rates in the 1990s Predicting Crime Booms and Busts," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25, no. 1 (1999): 145.

months since 1973 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.¹⁹¹ The UNODC published crime rates for Honduras come from the criminal justice system two main data points: the Observatorio Centroamericano sobre Violencia (The Central American Observatory on Violence, OCAVI) and the National Statistical Office (NSO). OCAVI source of data comes from the police.¹⁹² As highlighted earlier, the Honduran police force did not exist as an autonomous institution until 1999, is rampant with corruption, lack of capacity, training, and is hamstrung by lack of resources; therefore, because few crimes are reported to the police and with limited data gathering for most other crimes besides homicides, the data are not reliable.

The comparison with the United States at first may be thought of as a stretch given the differences in the economy, power, among others. However, a key development in crime in Central America has been the influence of the United States. Already well-documented, is the United States' support of military regimes and authoritarian dictatorships against the perceived communist threat. Second, the end of the Cold War and the United States excess of power shifted policy to spreading democracy in weak states. Third, neoliberal economic policies also brought ideas and strategies to fight violence. The region has seen a proliferation of Western ideas—aided with the influence of foreign aid, of how to reduce crime. I argue that the problem is that when this occurred in the late 1990s, the United States' understanding of crime was flawed, and those ideas made their way to Central America. While repressive policies were the result of the preference of authoritarian policies in the Northern Triangle, this approach was in part because these countries sought to simulate the practices in the United States in the hope that their crime rates would decline as well.

A major blunder in the understanding in criminality in the United States happened when researchers propagated the concept of the generation of “superpredators.”¹⁹³ According to predictions, with a growing youth population in the United States these young killers “would soon unleash the full force of their destructive capacities on an

¹⁹¹ LaFree, “Declining Violent Crime Rates in the 1990s,” 146.

¹⁹² UNODC, *2013 Global Study On Homicide*, 121.

¹⁹³ LaFree, “Declining Violent Crime Rates in the 1990s,” 145.

already crime-weary nation.”¹⁹⁴ The results were passage of laws with mandatory sentences, harsher penalties for repeated offenders and removing discretionary power of judges during sentencing. In 1996, U.S. imprisonment rates increased to 427 per 100,000 residents, four times the rates of 1974.¹⁹⁵ Today, the United States has 25percent of the world’s prison population at 2.4 million, nearly 750 inmates per 100,000 residents.¹⁹⁶

The study of crime waves in Honduras might be advanced by examining research in other fields such as economics and migration. The current crime wave in Honduras also correlates with wave of out-migration, deportations rates, maras and the rise of drug trafficking. The relationship highlights the changes in the environmental conditions to commit crime. A person’s “decisions to commit crime are in part a product of how many other people are engaging in crime at a given point in time.”¹⁹⁷

Honduras mano dura policies were attempting to replicate the results in the United States. One of the most cited successes was that of New York City in the 90s. New York City had 2,262 homicides in 1990; six years later the number declined 57 percent to 985 homicides.¹⁹⁸ Several other U.S. cities also saw their numbers decline, and the success was attributed to changes in policing strategies. New York City strategy focused on “quality of life” offenses such as drinking in public, and urinating in the streets. The strategy was targeted against “young toughs” perceived as threatening to their neighborhoods.¹⁹⁹

On its own, replicating the success of New York City appeared as a good template. However, after further analysis, the connection between the decline of homicide rates and police strategy might have been purely coincidental and not cause and effect. The questioning comes after results in other cities that did not change policing styles had

¹⁹⁴ LaFree, “Declining Violent Crime Rates in the 1990s,”145.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 155.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Kelly, “Signs that the United States Prison System is out of Control,” Accessed, March 21, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/americas-prison-system-is-out-of-control-2012-4?op=1#ixzz2ALyi3oRj>.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 160.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 155.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 155.

declining rates as well. Therefore, the declines in crime rates are not necessarily correlated to policy and police action. The direct correlation is directly attributed to the criminalization of lesser infractions that in part has led to the highest incarceration rates.

The incarceration rates provided a correlation to preventing crime that might not have been there. In the eyes of law enforcement and policy-makers, more people in jails meant less crime in the street. It seemed like a positive correlation. That conclusion, however, does not take into account factors that are independent to crime policy. LaFree calls these factors “exogenous effects.”²⁰⁰

Among the exogenous effects most often linked to violent crime by researchers are economic stress, political legitimacy, and family disorganization.²⁰¹ All these three factors are present in the Honduras violent crime landscape. The economic stress is a popular explanation, given the dismal wages and employment opportunities in Honduras. Because of the lack of longitudinal data, it is difficult to assess how strong the correlation between economic stress and crime actually is. What is known is that the out-migration is directly linked to the stress brought on by lack of opportunities in the home country. Since that is a recent phenomenon, making any correlation between cause and effect is precarious. While economic stress is not necessarily invariant given the changes in the global economy and the ongoing transformation in Honduras from subsistence agriculture to manufacturing and services, the study must contrast the economic stress of today versus previous decades. That, however, is difficult to correlate and measure.

The weak institutions in Honduras provide a positive correlation to violent crime. Weber defines legitimate power as “the probability that certain commands from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons.”²⁰² The commands from the state institutions are not followed by the population and there is no “voluntary submission.” That means that most laws that the state seeks the population to comply with must be directly enforced. The social control mechanisms at the local level are not strong enough.

²⁰⁰ Kelly, “United States Prison System is Out of Control,” 148.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 148.

²⁰² Ibid., 149.

The political legitimacy is further complicated with low levels of trust and political instability in the executive, judicial and congress.

While institutions are part of the solution and responsible for setting the conditions for public security, they are not the major reason for the boom in the crime wave. There are other exogenous factors that have affected the criminal environment. Drug trafficking, especially cocaine, has provided the resources for criminals to expand their activities throughout Honduras. Complicating the correlation between drugs and crime is that, as cocaine trafficking from Honduras started to increase, cocaine consumption in the United States has decreased by 40 percent between 1999 and 2009. The shift demonstrates that addiction is not unique to Americans and that other nations are becoming larger consumers. While 63 percent of the world's cocaine supply is consumed in the Americas, Europeans consumed 29 percent. Consumption of cocaine has doubled in 27 EU countries from 1998 through 2006.²⁰³ With Europeans paying more than twice as much as American consumers, it appears that even as the United States consumption declines the drug trade will remain as part of the Honduran criminal landscape.

Drugs are not the only commodity affecting the boom in crime the proliferation of firearms has armed most of the criminals in the country. An estimated 82 percent of all homicides are committed with a firearm, mostly by criminal organizations. The long guns remained in circulation since the end of the Cold War. There is a preference for handguns to commit crime because they are easier to conceal. Between 2008 and 2011, 9mm pistols accounted for 63 percent of the weapons seized. While some are smuggled into the country, most of the handguns in Honduras are bought and then exported legally from the United States. Another major factor is leakage of firearms from the civilian, police, and military sector to the criminal sector.²⁰⁴

Honduras has become a major trafficker in guns, particularly to Colombia and Mexico. The military and police stockpiles in the Northern triangle have been identified

²⁰³ Bagley, "Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in the Americas," 2.

²⁰⁴ UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean A Threat Assessment* (New York, NY: United Nations Publications, September 2012), 61.

as the largest sources of illegal firearms in the region. UNODC estimates that 36 percent of the illegal trafficked firearms in Colombia come from Central America. Additionally, heavy guns recovered in Mexico have been traced to United States sales to the Honduran military.²⁰⁵ Nicaragua and Panama are major players as well. Nicaragua has the largest surplus of firearms in the region and is the destination of illicit weapons shipments. Panama, with its duty free arms purchases, is a convenient shopping center for 9mm pistols that are currently in high demand.²⁰⁶

In sum, the study of Honduras violence is complex. The crime boom, which began in the late 1990s, points to transnational criminals and drug trafficking as the major factors affecting the criminal environment. Predicting whether the current trend will remain or when it will begin to decline is difficult. That will depend on the staying power of drug trafficking and Honduras becoming a producer and processor in addition to *transportistas*. The current crime rates are sustainable, while the public security environment is dangerous to say the least; nonetheless, Hondurans have adopted coping mechanisms.

The current positive feedback loops—the sources of growth, explosion, and collapse in systems—will continue until it they destroy themselves, or reach the maximum the Honduran society can tolerate. Sooner or later, regardless of how high the crime rate gets, it must come down either by itself or when self-correcting measures kick in, as in negative feedback loops.²⁰⁷

Donella Meadows calls for caution when there is great demand to intervene in a system.²⁰⁸ Misunderstanding the problem may lead to not targeting the right sources of growth and in turn put in place the wrong negative feedback loops. Doing so will not only make the problem worse, but it will make every decision thereafter much more difficult. There are no free trials and every decision has severe consequences.

²⁰⁵ UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*, 62.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Donella H. Meadows, “Leverage Points Places to Intervene in a System,” *The Sustainability Institute* (1999), 11.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 21.

That is why the lack of longitudinal and ethnography research into the crime boom in the Honduras violent landscape needs to be addressed before reaching a conclusion. The study of the crime waves in the United States and the flawed conclusions reached in the 1990s provide a cautionary tale of the problems with predicting crime and busts and when, how, and where to intervene.

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V. CONCLUSION

Honduras is a country with a myriad of problems. The country is one of the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, the corruption levels among the highest, the impunity rate is over 95 percent, the infrastructure of the country is among the worst, the education system is outdated and underfunded, the country has an internal deficit and external deficit, usually pays off interest by delaying payments to government employees. The police have resisted reforms, and efforts to purge the police of corruption through vetting have been slowed. The prison situation is critical and the country is on the losing end of the balloon and cockroach effect.

The long-term effects of development have been covered extensively in Latin American literature, but they are only part of the public security failure in Honduras. Economic development is important to fund education, healthcare and provide jobs to an increasing young population. The economic opportunity that explains the security breakdown in Honduras today is the dramatic increase in the illicit economy and the growth of transnational criminal organizations that have successfully established operations in Honduras. One thing is for the state not to have the resources to advance development, another thing is to have a large powerful criminal element willing and able to fight and bribe the Honduran state and its population. After all, Honduras has one of the weakest state apparatuses and weakest society. The combinations of these two factors have turned Honduras into a criminal's paradise. Honduras is the newest version of Colombia of the 1990s and of Northern Mexico in the early part of this century.

The concept for this thesis began with analyzing public security at a country at the crossroads. As the research for this project developed, it became evident that such descriptions of Honduras at the crossroads and at critical juncture have been used regularly to describe the situation. Yet, it became evident to understand the correlation of development of the state institutions and political parties with the new criminal actors. To bring the discussion of public security in Honduras up to date also requires going beyond the headlines of chronic poverty and inequality, latest coup, and maras. While there is not one single factor responsible for the increase violence in Honduras, the current situation

is defined by criminal organizations foreign and native to Honduras as well as the exponential rise in the illicit economy.

At the beginning of the century with the influence of Samuel Zemurray, the United Fruit Company (UFCO) became the most powerful actor in Honduras politics and the economy. Moreover, in the 1950s, several coups by the military and within the military shifted power between the two political parties and the military. Mario Posas' 1980s article, "Honduras at the Crossroads," brought attention to the Honduran struggle for political inclusion and the influence of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and violence in Guatemala and the political influence of the United States.

The study of homicides and violence in Honduras is a conundrum. On the one hand, most explanations for causations or factors that affect the criminal environment are present. Poverty levels and underdevelopment have left very few resources for the state. Migration to the United States, shift in the traditional roles with more women in the workplace, and the increase in the urban population also have coincided with high levels of crime. Complicating things further, deportations from the United States also brought the gang culture of territoriality, extortions, and the threat of death altered the power dynamics. At the very same time, the police was reborn as an independent institution, outside the structure of the military. Natural disasters, with Hurricane Mitch, also contributed to the severe economic situation by destroying many of the crops and exports in the country.

In 2007, a major shift in drug trafficking made the Honduran territory a spoke and mini hub of cocaine distribution, with increasing amounts staying in country. In 2009, the coup that removed Manuel Zelaya, further demonstrated that political divide that exists in the country. Moreover, *The Good Coup*, as titled by Marco Caceres Di Orio,²⁰⁹ further deteriorated the economic and security situation in the country. It was during Zelaya's term that the Honduran Caribbean coast became a major transshipment location for drug traffickers. Complicating things further, according to a former security minister,

²⁰⁹ Marco Caceres Di Orio, *The Good Coup The Overthrow of Manuel Zelaya in Honduras* (British Columbia: CCB Publishing, 2010).

30 percent of police officers were involved in organized crime and 50 percent of the investigative unit was in the payroll of one of the two Mexican cartels.²¹⁰

The only explanation that Honduras does not have is that it did not have a civil war or a revolutionary movement like its neighbors El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Because everything appears to fit as an explanation to the breakdown in public security, this has blurred what is the real problem. Therefore, to solve the crime problem the country's leaders have utilized the explanations and acted to curb the increase in violence. Despite the good intentions of the Honduran government, the reforms and policies to curb violence did not account for the complexity of the Honduras problem. That is, gangs, drug trafficking, sicarios, corruption, do not exist in a vacuum. The second-, third-, and fourth-order effects, and so on, were not properly accounted for. Every action that the government has taken not only has not worked, but has also worsened the conditions making subsequent decisions more difficult.

Scarce resources and the increasing violence in part fueled by drug trafficking has impacted the state's decision to once again use the armed forces for public security. Hondurans institutions are rampant with high level and low level corruption, and the options are limited. Not since Juan Matta Ballesteros have there been powerful actors able to challenge the state. Today, there are hundreds if not thousands of criminals claiming their space in Honduras.

The Quagmire of Militarization of Pubic Security

The current action to curb violence through militarization of public security has its limits. Without a clear long-term strategy to develop a strong police force, strengthening the criminal justice system and create checks and balances against corruption the country is unlikely to see better results down the road. There are no quick fixes when it comes to crime. A clear strategy with the use of the military during the current severe security crisis, coupled with a plan to address the shortcomings of institutions must be done in parallel. In the current situation, even if the rates decrease as the first three months of 2014 have shown, the remainder of the state remains broken.

²¹⁰ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 175.

The use of the military has been the easy button to push while the remainder of the state and society remain weak.

Notwithstanding, the state must fight the major drug trafficking element taking root in the country. Honduras is in danger of becoming a processor and producer. There are thousands of drug dealers, transporters and facilitators. Easy money has made its way into the Honduran economy, creating the largest source of illicit income the country has ever seen. These criminal bands are now able to fight the state authorities and bribe them. The use of TIGRES and PMOP must be used strategically to after the most dangerous criminals that operate in and out of Honduras. The situation is critical and actions to combat the transnational crime element must be swift and severe. The trend will prove difficult if those killed and arrested are the petty criminals at the bottom of the food chain, while the most powerful and astute are able to circumvent the justice system and evade prosecution. A near-term solution may lay in an extraditing agreement with the United States for the most wanted criminals, but at some point the Public Ministry and the criminal justice system must stand on their own. The reality, however, is that it will take many years for that to happen.

Arrests and Detentions

The Honduran police and authorities performing law enforcement must not conduct arrests of suspected mareros without a strong likelihood of imprisonment. Mareros that are arrested and then returned to the streets because of lack of evidence or a weak case, only become stronger upon their return to their community. The street stories of how tough they are and how they can get away with things are reinforced when they are released. Roundup followed by quick release increases their credibility in the street and helps them recruit more street children and juveniles from their barrios. Further, the lessons in Latin America and Central America in particular have shown that a state cannot incarcerate its way out of the security problem.

Furthermore, the prison situation must be addressed so that prisoners are not able to send orders for murder and extortions from inside prison walls. Passage of the law forcing the termination of cell coverage, and placing the military to guard the outside

perimeters, are only temporary band-aids. The situation has the potential to escalate to the point of more tragedies like the three previous fires, but also creating a powerful prison culture that may outlast the current crime wave.

Honduran prisons are not only run by inmates, but the prison administrators lack the capacity, training and resources to do much of anything except hope that the prisoners do not revolt. In fact, the Director of the Honduran prison system, Santos Simeón Flores, when confronted with the issues of Honduran prisons and notorious criminals escaping did not argue against the claims. However, the situation and conditions of the prison system that he portrayed is so dire that the only thing keeping prisoners from rioting, killing each other or attempting to escape is by the grace of God.²¹¹

Partnership for Rehabilitation

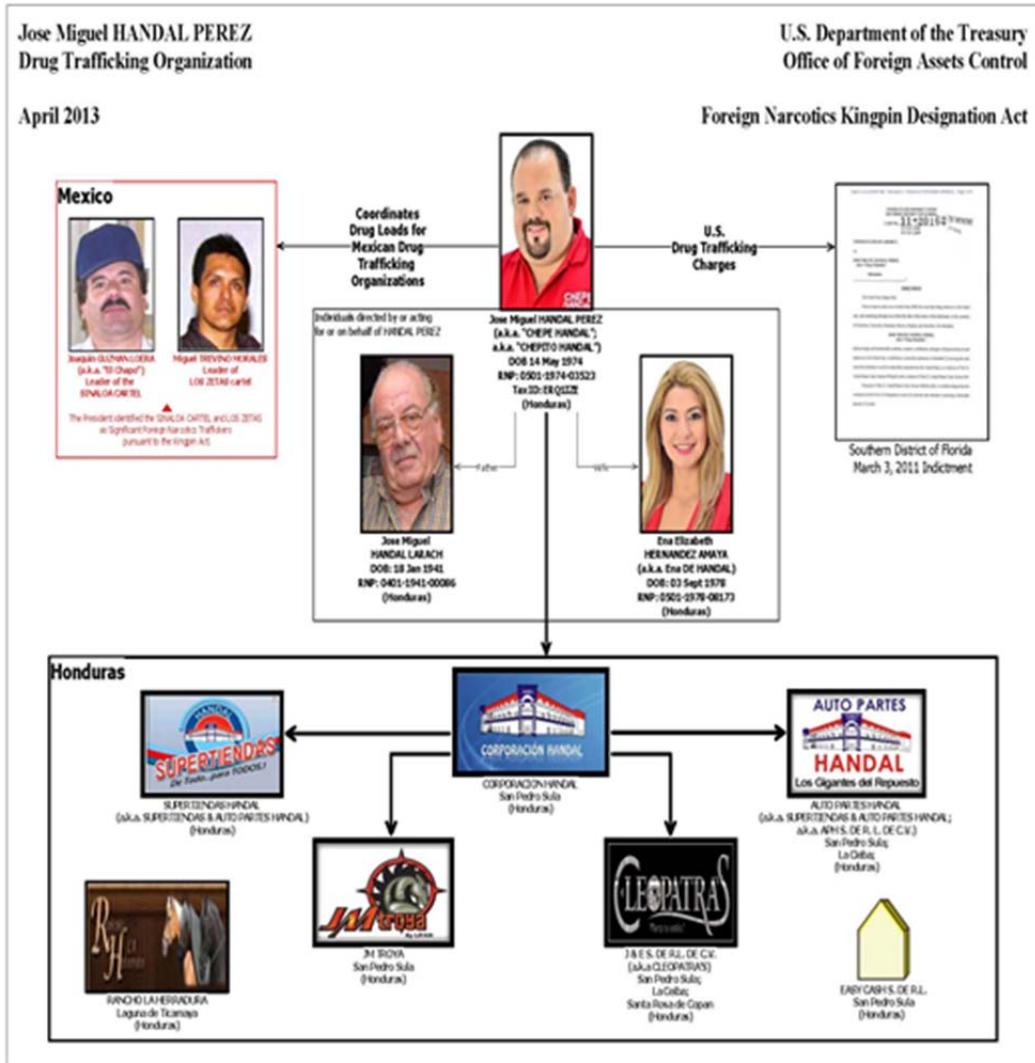
The Honduran state is no position to arrest thousands of youths and put them in prison with older more dangerous criminals or in juvenile prisons where there are no resources to attend to their needs. A more practical approach will be to partner with organizations and churches that have experience working with troubled youth. This also adds a layer of legitimacy that the government is trying to help at-risk youth while at the same time incorporating civil society and families as part of the solution.

Any plan of action in Honduras must take into account that the change in the criminal environment needs to be long-term, but must also have attainable short-term and medium-term results. The policies may not survive unless there is buy-in from the population, and for that citizens need to see that things are getting progressively better. Thus far, Honduran leaders are correctly fixated on *chamba y seguridad* (jobs and security) as the answer to virtually all the problems, but not all are pushing with all their might and when they do it is usually in the wrong direction.

²¹¹ Frente A Frente: Honduras “Debate con el Director de Centros Penitenciarios,” April 7, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ESg51dQX_M.

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APPENDIX A. HANDAL PEREZ DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION



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APPENDIX B. LOS CACHIROS DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION

Foreign Narcotics
Kingpin Designation Act

September 2013

LOS CACHIROS

In May 2013, the President designated
Los Cachiros.

LOS CACHIROS DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION

LEADERS



**Devis Leonel
RIVERA MARADIAGA**
DOB 28 Mar 1977
NI 0209-1977-00375
(Honduras)



**Javier Eriberto
RIVERA MARADIAGA**
DOB 20 Apr 1972
NI 0209-1972-00282
(Honduras)

Nicaraguan Charges
Drug Trafficking,
Money Laundering,
& Organized Crime
August 2012



Arrested in
Nicaragua
August 2012

HONDURAN ASSOCIATES & FAMILY MEMBERS



**Santos Isidro
RIVERA CARDONA**
DOB 15 May 1949
NI 0209-1949-00019
(Honduras)



**Esperanza Caridad
MARADIAGA LOPEZ**
DOB 30 Sep 1950
NI 1517-1950-00095
(Honduras)



**Maira Lizeth
RIVERA MARADIAGA**
DOB 17 Dec 1975
alt. DOB 17 Dec 1976
NI 0209-1976-00026
(Honduras)



**Santos Isidro
RIVERA MARADIAGA**
DOB 5 Jun 1985
NI 0209-1985-02347
(Honduras)

NICARAGUAN ASSOCIATE



**Bismarck Antonio
LIRA JIRON**
DOB 27 Apr 1973
Cedula No. 288-270473-000ZY
(Nicaragua)

BUSINESSES



**INMOBILIARIA RIVERA
MARADIAGA SA DE CV**
(aka INRIMAR)
RTN 08019009234360
(Honduras)



**PALMA DEL
BAJO AGUAN SA**
RTN 05019007109210
(Honduras)



**INVERSIONES TURISTICAS
JOYA GRANDE SA DE CV**
RTN 08019011356332
(Honduras)



**GANADEROS AGRICULTORES
DEL NORTE S DE RL DE CV**
RTN 05019005483678
(Honduras)



**MINERA MI
ESPERANZA SA**
RTN 08019011419066
(Honduras)

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